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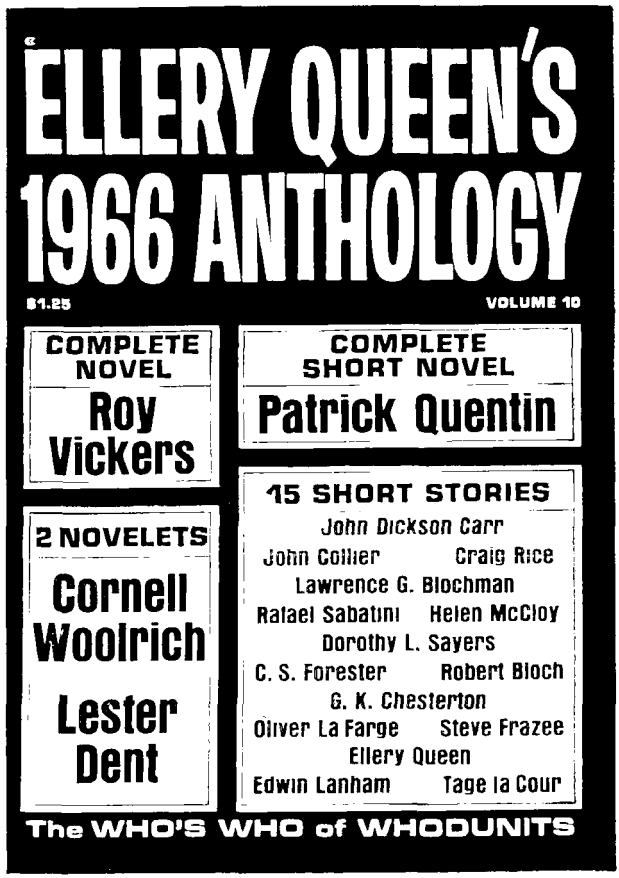

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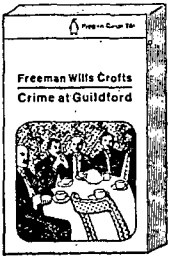

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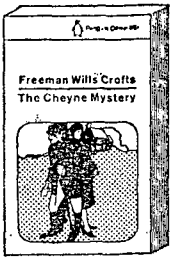

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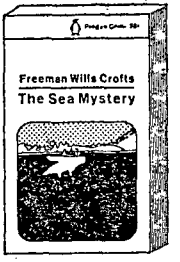

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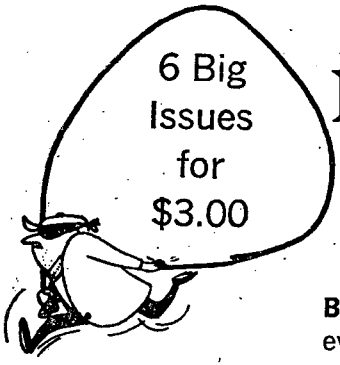

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a new story by

AUTHOR: **CHRISTIANNA BRAND**

TITLE: ***Blood Brothers***

TYPE: Crime and Detection

DETECTIVE: Inspector Cockrill

LOCALE: Birdswell, England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Inspector Cockrill said, "Well, well, so you're the famous Birdswell twins! . . . An almost mystic bond, I hear? . . . In fact, you might properly be called—blood brothers?"*

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AND DEVOTED, I HEAR? . . . DAVID and Jonathan?" he said. "In fact, you might properly be called," he said, with that glitter in his eye, "blood brothers?"

Well, he can sneer, but it's true we was pally enough, Fred and me, till Lydia came along. Shared the same digs in the village—Birdswell's our village, if you know it?—Birdswell, in Kent.

Everyone in Birdswell knows us—even if they can't easily tell the difference between us—and used to say how wonderful it was, us two so alike, with our strong legs and big shoulders and curly red hair, like a kid's; and what a beautiful understanding we always had, what a bond of union. Well, people talk a lot of nonsense about identical twins.

Lydia couldn't tell the difference between us either—seemingly. Was that my fault? Fair enough, she was Fred's girl first—unless you counted her husband, and to some extent you did have to count him: six foot five, he is, and it isn't only because he's the blacksmith that they call him Black Will.

But she switched to me of her

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own accord, didn't she?—even if I wasn't too quick to disillusion her, the first time she started with her carryings-on, mistaking me for Fred. "*I* can't help it if she fancies me more than you, now," I said to Fred.

"You'll regret this, you two-timing, double-crossing skunk," said Fred. He always did have a filthy temper, Fred did.

Well, I did regret it, and not so very long after. Fred and me shares a car between us—a heavy, old, bashed-up, fourth-hand "family model," but at least it goes. And one evening, when he'd slouched off, ugly and moody as he was those days, to poach the river down by the Vicarage woods, I picked up Lydia and took her out in it, joy-riding.

Not that there was much joy in it. We hadn't been out twenty minutes when, smooching around with Lydia, I suppose, and not paying enough attention to the road—well, I didn't see the kid until I'd hit him. Jogging along the grass verge the kid was, with his little can of blackberries, haring home as fast as his legs would go, a bit scared, I daresay, because the dark was catching up on him.

Well, the dark caught him up all right, poor little kid. I scrambled out and knelt down and turned him over; and got back again, quick. "He's gone," I said to Lydia, "and we'd best be gone too."

She made a lot of fuss, woman-like, but what was the point of it? If he wasn't dead now, he would be mighty soon, there wasn't any doubt of it, lying there with the can still clutched in his fat little hand and the blackberries spilt, and scattered all around him. I couldn't do nothing; if I could have, I daresay I'd have waited, but I couldn't. So what was the use of bringing trouble on myself, when the chances were that I could get clear away with it?

And I did get clear away with it. The road was hard and dry, the cars that followed and stopped must have obscured my tire marks, if there were any. They found half a footprint in the dried mud, where I'd bent over him; but it was just a cheap, common make of shoe, pretty new so that it had no particular marks to it; and a largish size, of course, but nothing out of the ordinary.

So no one knew I'd been on that road—everything Lydia did with us two was done in deep secret, because of Black Will. Will was doing time at the moment, for beating up a keeper who came on him, poaching (we all spent most of our evenings, poaching). But he'd be back some day, Black Will would.

And Fred promised me an alibi when I told him about it, clutching at his arm, shaking a bit by this time, losing confidence because Lydia was threatening to turn nasty. "I'll say you was in the woods with me," he said.

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And he did, too. They came to our door—"regulation police inquiries." But Lydia didn't dare tell, not really—I could see that in the light of day—and they had no other sort of reason to suspect me, especially. And nobody did—it could have been any stranger, speeding along the empty country roads.

Fred pretended to be reluctant to alibi me, cagey about saying where we was—because of the poaching. He managed it fine, sort of threw their interest halfway in a different direction. I thought it was decent of Fred, considering about me and Lydia. But brotherly love is a wonderful thing, isn't it?

Or is it? Because it hadn't been all for nothing. No sooner was I clear of that lot than he said to me, "Well, has she told you?"

"Told me what?" I said. "Who? Lydia?"

"Lydia," he said. "She's having a baby."

"Well, don't look at me," I said, and quick. "I've only been going with the girl a couple of weeks."

"And her husband hasn't been going with her at all," said Fred. "On account of he's been in prison for the past five months."

"For half killing a man," I said thoughtfully; and I looked Fred up and down. Fred and me are no weeds, like I said, but Black Will, he's halfway to a giant.

"And due out at the end of October," said Fred.

"Well, good luck to the two of you," I said. "It's nothing to do with me. I went with her for a couple of weeks, and now even that's over. She reckons I ought to have stopped and seen to the kid; she's given me the air."

"She'll give you more than the air," he said, "and me too, when Will comes home. When he knows about the baby he'll beat the rest out of her; and then God help you and me too."

"The baby could be Jimmy Green's," I said. "Or Bill Bray's. She's been out with them, too."

"That's her tales," he said, "to make you jealous. They're a sight too scared of Will to let Lydia make up to them. And so ought you and I have been too, if we'd had any sense." Only where Lydia was concerned, there never seemed to be time to have sense; and six months ago, Fred said, Black Will's return had seemed like a century away.

"So what are you going to do?" I said.

"What are *you* going to do?" he said. "A hit-and-run driver—you can get a long stretch for that."

Good old brotherly love!—Fred worrying about me, when after all I *had* pinched his girl. And him in such trouble himself.

We went out in the car where no one could hear us—our old landlady's pretty deaf and takes no interest at all in our comings and goings, but Fred wasn't taking no chances.

Because it was all Fred's idea;

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that I will say, and stick to it—it was all Fred's idea. Dead men tell no tales, said Fred; nor dead girls, neither. "If they find she's in the family way—it's like you said, she'd been going with half the men in the village. So once she was past talking, Will couldn't pin it on us two—not to be certain, he couldn't."

"Speak for yourself," I said.

"She'd be past talking about the hit-and-run, too," he said. "You say she's sore about that. She won't tell now, because it means admitting she was joy-riding with you; but once Black Will gets it out of her that she was—and he will, you can bet on it—then she'll tell about the accident too; it'll make her feel easier."

"So what do you suggest?" I said. "*I'm* not killing the girl, I can tell you that, flat."

"No," he said, "I'll do that. You've done one killing— that'll do for you. All I want from you now is an alibi."

"What, me alibi you?" I said. "No one'd believe it for a minute. One twin speaking up for another—the whole village would testify how 'close' we are."

But Fred had thought of all that too. If a straight alibi failed, he said, there were other ways of playing it. He had it all worked out—suspiciously well worked out, I should have thought; but he gave me no time for thinking. "It won't come to any alibi, our names probably won't even come into it—as you say, the baby could have been fathered by half the male population of Birdswell. But if it does—well, you alibi for me and I alibi for you. They'll know it was one of us, but they'll never know which one; and if they don't know which of us, they'll have to let both of us go."

"And Black Will?" I said. "When we've not only seduced his wife, but murdered her—which one of us will *he* let go?"

"Oh, well," he said, "we'd have to clear out if it got as far as that, start again somewhere else. But the chances are a hundred to one it'll never come to that. After all, no one suspected you of the hit-and-run affair, did they?"

He kept coming back to that, sort of nastily. I didn't forget that I'd done him wrong, pinching his girl. But that was his lever, really—while he kept reminding me, he could pretty well force me to go in with him. He was in trouble—but I was in trouble even deeper.

So we worked it out—we worked out everything to the last detail. This was Tuesday, and we'd do it Thursday night. I'd see nothing more of the girl; but he'd get her to go driving with him on the pretense of talking over the baby business. And he'd lead round to the accident, advising her to confess to the police it was me, and then drive past where it happened. And get her out of the car and show him just where the boy was lying. And

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then—well, then there'd be a second hit-and-run killing on that lonely spot. "*You* got away with it once," he kept saying. "Why *not* another?"

There was a kind of—well, justice, in it, I thought. After all, it was because she was threatening to tell about the hit-and-run that I was letting her be murdered.

"But what about clues?" I said. "Even I left a footprint."

He had worked that out too. He and I are the same size, of course, and most of our clothes are the same as one another's. Not for any silly reason like dressing identical, but simply because when he'd go along shopping, I'd go along too, and mostly we liked the same things; or he'd buy something and it'd be a success, so I'd buy the same, later.

We'd dress the same Thursday night, he said, because of the alibi; and we checked our stuff over—shoes, gray slacks, shirts, without jackets—this all happened in September.

Our blue poplins were in the wash—we'd worn them clean Sunday, and second-day Monday; so it would have to be the striped wool-and-nylon—a bit warm for this weather, if anyone remarked it, but we'd have to risk that, I said, we daren't ask the old woman to wash out our blue ones special. The last thing we wanted was to do anything out of the ordinary. That was what the police looked for—a break in routine. That was asking for it.

Our shoes were the same—same size, same make, bought together, with a rubber sole that had bars across it; but, like I said, new enough not to be worn down, or have any peculiarities. And everything else we'd wear would be identical—not only for the alibi, but in case of bits caught in the girl's fingernails or whatnot—you've only got to read the papers to know what they look for.

Not that he meant to get near enough for that. But she might not—well, she might not kick in at once, if you see what I mean; he might have to get out of the car and do something about it. And in case of scratches, he said, I'd better be prepared to get some scratches on my own hands too—we could say we'd been blackberrying or something.

"Blackberrying," I said. "That'd be bloody likely! We both detest blackberries—everybody knows it; or anyway, the old woman knows it, we never touch her blackberry pie."

I knew he'd only said it to remind me of the kid—him and his little can of blackberries, spilt all around him.

"Oh, well," he said, "say we got scratched pushing thorugh the brambles down by the river. Do your poaching down by the bramble patch."

But she didn't scratch him. It was

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all a bit grim, I think; he couldn't be sure she was properly done in and he had to get out of the car and have a look and—well, go back and take a second run at her. But she didn't have the strength left to scratch him.

All the same, he looked pretty ghastly when finally we met in the moonlight, in the Vicarage woods. He didn't say anything, just stood there, staring at me with a sort of sick, white heaviness.

I couldn't exactly say anything either; it was worse than, talking it over, I'd thought it ever would be. I sort of—well, looked a question at him; and he gave me a weary kind of nod and glanced away towards the river. It was easier to talk about my angle, so I said, at last, "Well, I saw the Vicar."

"But did he see you?" he said. We'd agreed on the Reverend because he always walked across to the church of a Thursday evening; you'd be sure of passing him if you went at a certain time.

"Yes," I said. "He saw me. I gave a sort of grunt for 'good evening,' and he said, 'Going poaching?' and gave me a bit of a grin. You'd better remember that." He nodded again but he said nothing more; and more to ease the silence than anything else, I said, "Is the car all right? Not marked?"

"What does it matter if it is?" he said. "It's marked all over, no one could say what's old or what's new —you know that, from bashing the boy." As for bits of her clothing and —well, blood and all that, he'd had the idea of spreading a bit of plastic over the front of the car before he—well, did it. He produced the plastic folded in brown paper, and we wrapped the whole lot round a stone and sank it, then and there, in the river. There was blood on the plastic, all right. It gave me the shudders.

But next thing he said that I really had something to shudder at. "Anyway, *your* number's up, mate. She's shopped you."

"Shopped me?" I said. I stood and stared at him.

"Shopped you," he said. "She'd already sent off an anonymous note to the police. About the hit-and-run."

"How do you know?" I said. I couldn't believe it.

"She told me so," he said. "It was on her conscience, what you'd done."

Her conscience! Lydia's conscience! I started to laugh, a bit hysterical, I suppose, with the strain of it. He put his hand on my wrist and gave me a little shake.

"Steady lad," he said. "Don't lose your head. I'm looking after you." It wasn't like him to be so demonstrative, but there you are—it's like the poem says, when times are bad, there's no friend like a brother. "It's just a matter of slanting the alibi," he said.

Well, we'd worked that out, too. There'd always be a risk that they

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wouldn't accept a brother's alibi, that the two of us was together. The other time, about the accident, they'd had no special reason to suspect me, so they'd accepted that all right; but this time it might at any moment turn into a murder inquiry—and a murder inquiry into *us,* now that they knew about the hit-and-run.

But as Fred said—we had the alternative all ready.

I hadn't counted on its being Inspector Cockrill. When I realized it was him—come all the way over from Heronsford—I knew they meant business. And to be honest, it struck a bit of chill into the heart of me.

A little man he is, for a policeman, and near retiring age he must be—looks like a grandfather; but his eyes are as bright as a bird's and they seem to look right into you. He came into the old woman's best parlor and he had us brought in there, and he looked us up and down.

"Well, well," he said, "so you're the famous Birdswell twins! You certainly are identicals, aren't you?" And he gave us a look of a sort of fiendish glee, or so it seemed to me, and said, "And devoted, I hear? An almost mystic bond, I hear? David and Jonathan, Damon and Pythias, and all the rest of it? In fact," he said, "you might properly be called—blood brothers?"

We stood in front of him, silent. He said at last, "Well, which is which?—and no nonsense."

We told him—*and* no nonsense.

"So you're the one that killed the child?" he said to me. "And drove on, regardless."

"I never was near the child," I said. "I was in the woods that evening—poaching."

"Yours is the name stated in the anonymous letter."

"I don't know who wrote the letter," I said. "But no one can tell us apart, me and my brother."

"Even your fancy girl?" he said. "It appears it was she who wrote the letter."

"I don't know what you mean," I said, "by my fancy girl."

"Well, everyone else does," he said. "All the village knows she was playing you off, one against the other. And all the village has been grinning behind their hands, waiting for her husband's homecoming."

"But I tell you none of them can tell us apart," I said. "I was out poaching."

"That's a damn lie," said Fred, playing it the way we'd agreed upon. "That was me, poaching."

"One of you was poaching?" said Inspector Cockrill, very smooth, "And one of you was with the lady? And even the lady couldn't have said which was which?"

He said it sort of, well, suggestive. "I daresay she might," I said, "later on in the proceedings. But there couldn't have been any pro-

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ceedings that night—there wouldn't have been time because the accident happened."

"Why should she say so positively it was you, then?"

"I daresay she thought it was me," I said. "I daresay he told her so. She'd finished with him—it would be the only way he could get back at her."

"I see," said Inspector Cockrill. "How very ingenious!" I didn't know whether he meant how ingenious of Fred to have thought of it then, or of me to think of it now.

"Don't you listen to him, sir," said Fred. "He's a bloody liar. I wasn't with the girl that night. I tell you I was poaching."

"All right, you were poaching," said Inspector Cockrill. "Any witnesses?"

"Of course not. You don't go poaching with witnesses. I used to go with him," said Fred bitterly, gesturing with his head towards me, "but not since he pinched my girl, the bloody so-and-so."

"And last night?" said the Inspector softly. "When the girl was murdered?"

"Last night too," said Fred. "I was in the woods, poaching."

"You call *me* a liar!" I said. "It was me in the woods. The Vicar saw me going there."

"It was me the Vicar saw," said Fred. "I told him, Good evening, and he laughed and said, 'Going poaching?'"

"There!" said Inspector Cockrill to me, like a teacher patiently getting the truth from a difficult child. "How could he know *that?* Because the Vicar will surely confirm it."

"He knows it because I told him," I said. "I told him I'd been poaching and I hoped the Vicar hadn't realized where I was going."

"Very ingenious," said Inspector Cockrill again. "Ve-ry ingenious."

It seemed like he couldn't get over it all, sitting there, shaking his head at the wonder of it. But I knew he was playing for time. I knew that we'd foxed him.

And Fred knew too. He suggested, reasonably, "Why should you be so sure, sir, that the girl was murdered? Why not just a second hit-and-run?"

"A bit of a coincidence?" said Inspector Cockrill mildly. "Same thing in the same place and so soon after? And when on top of it, we find that the girl was threatening a certain person with exposure, about the first hit-and-run . . ." He left it in the air. He said to his sergeant, "Have you collected their clobber?"

"Yes, sir," said the sergeant. "Two pairs of shoes—" and he gave the Inspector a sort of nod, as if to say, Yes, they look as if they'll match very nicely—"and all the week's laundry."

"Including Monday's?" said Cockrill.

"Including Monday evening's, sir. The old woman washes of a Monday morning. Anything they've

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worn after that—which includes two shirts to each, sir—is in two laundry baskets, one in each bedroom."

"Two baskets?" he says, looking more bright-eyed than ever. "That's a bit of luck. Their laundry's kept separate, is it?"

"Yes, it is," said Fred, though I don't know what call he had to butt in. "His in his room, mine in mine."

"And no chance of it's getting mixed up?" said Inspector Cockrill. He fixed Fred with that beady eye of his.

Fred, of course, was maintaining the mutual-accusation arrangement we'd agreed upon. "Not a chance, sir," he said a bit too eagerly.

I wasn't going to be left out, I said, "Not the slightest."

"That's right, sir," says the sergeant. "The old lady confirms it."

"Good," said Cockrill. He gave a few orders and the sergeant went away. People were still buzzing about, up in our bedrooms. "I'm coming," the Inspector called up to someone at the head of the stairs. He turned back to us. "All right, Cain and Abel," he said. "I'll leave you to stew in it. But in a day or two, as the song says, 'I'll be seeing you.' And when I do, it'll be at short notice. So stick around if you know what's good for you."

"And if we don't?" I said. "You've got nothing against us. You can't charge us, so you've got no call to be giving us orders."

"Who's giving orders?" he said. "Just a little friendly advice. But before you ignore the advice take a good, hard, long look at yourselves. You won't need any mirrors. And ask yourselves," he said, giving us a good, hard, long look on his own account, from the soles of our feet to the tops of our flaming red heads, "just how far you'd get."

So that was that; and for the next two days, we "stewed in it." David and Jonathan, Cain and Abel—like he'd said, blood brothers.

On the third day he sent for us, to Heronsford Police Station. They shoved Fred into one little room and me in another. He talked to Fred first, and I waited. All very chummy, cigs and cups of tea and offers of bread and butter; but it was the waiting . . .

Long after I knew I couldn't stand one more minute of it, the Inspector came in. I suppose they muttered some formalities, but I don't remember. Fred and I might hate one another, and by this time we did, well and truly, there's no denying it—but it was worse, a thousand times worse, without him there. My head felt as though it were filled with gray cottonwool, little, stuffy, warm clouds of it.

Inspector Cockrill sat down in front of me. He said, "Well, have you come to your senses? Of course you killed her?"

"If anyone killed her," I said, clinging to our patter, "it must have been him."

"Your brother?" he said. "But

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why should your brother have killed her?"

"Well," I said, "if the girl was having a baby—"

"A baby?" he said surprised, and his eyes got that bright, glittering look in them. "But she wasn't."

"She wasn't?" I said. "She *wasn't?* But she'd told him—"

Or had she told him? Something like an icicle of light—ice-cold, piercing, brilliant—thrust itself into the dark places of my cottonwool mind. I said, "The bloody, two-timing- double-crossing. . . !"

"*He* didn't seem," said the Inspector softly, "to expect her to have been found pregnant."

So that was it! So *that* was it! So as to get me to agree to the killing, to get me to help him with it . . . I ought to have been more fly—why should Fred, of all people, be so much afraid of Black Will as to go in for murder? Will's a dangerous man, but Fred's not exactly a softie.

The icicle turned in my mind and twisted, probing with its light rays into the cotton wooliness. Revenge! Cold, sullen, implacable revenge on the two of us—because Lydia had come over to me, because I had taken her away from him. Death for her—and I to be the accomplice in her undoing, and in my own undoing.

I knew now who had sent the anonymous note about the hit-and-run accident—so easily to be "traced" (after she was dead) to Lydia.

But yet, he was still as deep in it as I was—even deeper had he but known it. I said, fighting my way up out of the darkness, "Even if she *had* been pregnant, it wouldn't have been my fault. I'd only been going with her a couple of weeks."

"That's what you say," Cockrill said.

"But all the village—"

"All the village knew there were goings-on, but nobody knew just where they went on, or how long. You must, all three, have been remarkably careful."

I tried another tack. "But if she wasn't pregnant, why should I have killed her?"

"You've just told me yourself that you thought she was," he said.

"Because he told me—my brother told me. Now, look, Inspector," I said, trying to think it out as I went along, trying to ram it home to him, "you say she wasn't having a baby? So why should I have thought she was? *She* wouldn't have told me, if she hadn't been. So it was he who told me—my own brother. But you say yourself, he knew it wasn't true. So why should he have told me?"

He looked at me, cold as ice, and he said, "That's easy. He wanted *you* to kill *her* for *him*."

He wanted *me* to kill her! I could have laughed. The thing was getting fantastic, getting out of hand; and yet at the same time I had a feeling that the fantasy was a hard, gripping, grim fantasy, that once it

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had its hold on me it would never shake loose. I stammered out, "Why should he have wanted her killed?"

"Because," he said, "she was threatening to tell that it was he who ran the child down, and left it to die." And the Inspector said, cold and bitter, "I have no wish to trap you. We know that it was your brother who killed the child—we have proof of it. And we know it was you who killed the girl—we have proof of that too. There's her blood on your cuff."

On my cuff. Where Fred had put his hand that night—taking my wrist in his grasp, giving me a brotherly little shake "to steady me." I remembered how I'd thought, even then, that it wasn't like him to be so demonstrative.

Putting his hand on my wrist—fresh from the blood-smeared plastic he'd put on the front of the car. Making such a point, later on, about there being no chance of our soiled shirts getting confused, one with the other's.

So there it is. I wonder if we'll be doing our time in the same prison, sharing the same cell, maybe?—we two being blood brothers.

Because he'll be doing time all right, as well as me. While I'm doing my time for *his* killing the girl, he'll be doing his time for *my* killing the child.

Well, that's all right with me. He'll be first out, I daresay. Is it murder to leave a kid to die? I suppose not; the actual knocking down would be accidental, after all, not planned. So Fred'll be out first, and Black Will will be there to meet him. By the time I get out, I daresay Will will be back "in" for what he done to Fred—so it looks like being a very long time away, my ever meeting Black Will, I mean.

But can you beat it?—Fred working it out so far ahead, leading up to it so patiently, so softly, so craftily? Planting the blood on my cuff—and then leading up to it so softly, so craftily. And all for revenge—revenge on his own twin brother! And him planning and expecting me to pay for it all, and him planning to go scot-free.

After all, what *I* did, was done in self-preservation—there was no venom in it against Fred. That night after the car accident, I mean, when, clutching his arm and begging him to help me, when just to be on the safe side I rubbed his sleeve with the juice of a blackberry.

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Here is the second story about Unc in what can only be described as the slanguage of Variety-ese (the first story, "Unc Solves Flix Flap," appeared in the June 1965 issue of EQMM). And this time Uncle Pinkerton is even more in his own element, in his natural habitat . . . Shades of Ellis Parker Butler's Philo Gubb, George Barr McCutcheon's Anderson Crow, and Clarence Budington Kelland's Scattergood Baines!—yet Unc and his "Watson" Woody are altogether different, indeed sui generis, *and, criminologically speaking, a most welcome change of pace.*

UNC PROBES PICKLE PLOT

by JOHN JAKES

SHOWBIZ VAGARIES OFT TOPSYTURVY the travel skeds of scribes for *GALORE, The Newspaper of Amusement.* Viz., I wound up a road stanza covering a distrib conclave in Indpls. on a Tues., was then reshuffled via the Bell to catch a tenter tryout in O. on Thurs. In between, I decided on a quickie junket to Weevers, Ind., which is down in the hills and also home base for my only relatives, who raised me after my folks passed on.

Annual summer vacation in Weevers is usually sufficient to reacquaint me with my stix youth, but as my Aunt's birthday is in late Aug., timing was perfect to deliver giftie in the flesh.

As I wheeled in early Wed., a banner over the state route flacked MAMMOTH WEEVERS COUNTY FAIR. Subline noted that same had opened day before. Traveling with top down, I received the o.o. from locals who doubtless failed to recognize me in plaid sports coat and shades. I zipped out Elm Street to the big, old white house. Nobody home.

Next stop, Main Street. I located a slot in front of Floyd's Fountainette just as my Uncle Pinkerton hustled out the door of his hardware emporium opposite.

"Hey, Unc!" I waved, tickled to see him.

Unc ankled toward his old straight-stick Chev coupe. "Can't talk to any salesmen right now. There's an emergency—"

I dodged truck freighting a load of bossies, doffing my shades the while. "Unc, it's me."

He signified beaucoup surprise. "Woodrow! What in tarnation are you doing here out of the blue?"

"Figured I'd make a p.a. at Aunt Ellen's birthday bash." I gave a

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quick summary of my layover between engagements.

Unc shielded his eyes from the sun, which was lofty in the temp. department even for Aug. "Well, it's surely a treat to see you. But your Aunt Ellen just phoned me from the Fairgrounds. Something mystifying's happened and she's all upset. I'm on my way out there."

"Let's take the leased soft-top. She really perks."

"Soft-top? Is that your entertainment-paper term for a convertible? All right, if it'll make things any snappier."

We jumped in and I laid down a strip getting off. I was about to inquire anent the current brouhaha, in which Unc was a natch participant as he has an egghead rep in Weevers, when I spied a deejay sitting with a mike and turntable inside the window of the five-and-dimer.

"Is Radio Station WEEV running a promo, Unc?"

"Yes, Woodrow, that young fellow is new with WEEV. Jerry James is his name. He moved from Pennsylvania to join the station this spring. He's put on a whole raft of stunts like that. Mighty ambitious lad. He and his wife Betty are working hard to become part of Weevers society, such as it is. Matter of fact, it's his wife's pickles causing this puzzle that has your Aunt so worried."

"Anything with a deejay slant would make nifty *GALORE* copy, Unc. But what's the pickle angle?"

"It seems a jar of sweet gherkins has mysteriously turned into something looking like a jar of beets."

By now we had joined a caravan of rube wheels all influxing in direction of Ferris wheel, merry-go-round, grandstand, Exhibition Hall and other apparati comprising rural fest at the outskirts. Unc narrated the scenario thus far.

Because of her position as local culinary topliner, Aunt E. had been inked to femcee pickle contest at annual Weevers county gig. Prelims were held afternoon of day before, with three winners named by Aunt E. for final judging today.

On arriving at Fair locale this ayem, Aunt E. plus chrmn. of committee for judging all goody events (viz., choc. pie, stewed rutabagas, and other hix concoctions too numerous to mention) discovered one of trio of the top jars had been flummoxed overnight.

"Late last evening, Woodrow, your Aunt Ellen confided in me that there wasn't a shred of doubt in her mind as to whose sweet gherkins she'd pick for the Blue Ribbon today. What's upset her is, she got so enthusiastic yesterday that she accidentally let on. Best sweet gherkins she'd ever tasted. Now she's afraid she kind of showed the two other finalists they weren't going to win, and thereby caused someone to take a malicious step."

"Whose gherkins got the nod?"

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"Those of the so-called upstart wife of that radio-station boy. Apparently Betty James is a mighty good pickler."

"Say, watch that, Clyde," I cried to a rustic whose boat nearly dented my metal on the approach to the dusty parking field.

"Now, Woodrow," Unc said, "try not to insult the local population with your terminology. You know your Aunt thinks you're headed for hell in a handbasket as it is." But he grinned.

As we ankled, Unc backgrounded further aspects. Duo of other finalists was composed of lifelong Weevers residents, one having copped gherkins Blue Ribbon nine skeins running. Neither was likely to feel hotsy once Aunt E. let feline out of the container.

"There's LeRoy Tate waiting for us, Woodrow. He's the head of the Judges Committee I mentioned."

Same person hurried out of big corrugated tin joint marqueed Exhibition Hall. Tate was a thin type, had a WELCOME TO FAIR VISITORS badge hanging on his seersucker, and displayed mucho gloom in the eyeball region.

"Pinky, am I glad to see you. You're the only man in Weevers who can untangle this mess." His lamps hit me. I mentally itemed Tate as Assist. Principal from my days at Weevers H.S., but reaction was sans mutuality. "Say, who's this, Pinky?"

"LeRoy, you should remember him Woodrow Ennis, my sister Nella's boy."

Lotsa goggling. "Not little Woodrow Ennis who used to write those poems about frogs and pussywillows for the high school paper?"

"The same, Pops." But as I had forgotten "Pops" was not a sobriquet to be casually employed in stix, I added as a save, "I'm still scriveningh, though."

"Mostly in a foreign language," Unc smiled. "Woodrow reviews moving pictures and shows and things for a theatrical newspaper, LeRoy. He works in New York City. Behind the Hudson River Curtain, you might say."

"I sometimes wonder what today's youth is coming to," Tate muttered, leading way into premises. Exhibition Hall featured tractors, chicken feed troughs, bleating shoats, and other rural paraphernalia. The air was steambathish, so spectators rubbernecking various exhibs were on the sparse side. From one wall booth with soft drink dispensers, a grayhaired gent gave Unc a glower.

Unc waved cheerfully nonetheless: "Hello there, Floyd." Then, softer. "Small wonder he's hardly speaking. He showed up at the lodge last evening late, around 10:30. Had trouble putting up his booth in time. I gather. He came for the regular Tuesday night pinochle game, but he wasn't too friendly even then. Marvella must have told her pickles weren't going to

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win. Marvella is the wife of Floyd Bemis, Woodrow, remember?"

"Dig. Floyd's Fountainette."

"Marvella," said Tate, "is the nine-time gherkins champion. But I got to give her credit for being real calm this time. It's Lulu Clark who's kicking up a fuss."

Extent of my info about food prepping is that invisible folks do it somewhere behind the walls of Automats. However, there was no mistaking something amiss re the pickle presentation. Three large glass jars tagged *Finalist* decorated an aisle table. Bottles on left and right contained appetizing-looking gherkins. Bottle in center contained hideous beet-colored liquid so dark that pickles effectively did a hideout bit.

Three femmes stood several feet apart like starlets with a billing beef.

Unc said, "Hello, Marvella. Hello, Lulu. Howdydo, Mrs. James. Mighty fine-looking display here."

Unc bent to study the jars, hands in pockets of his wash pants. "No doubt that the contents of this one have been adulterated. No doubt at all."

"And I'll bet someone who's standing not very far away did it!"

Speaker was the youngest femme, a trim blondie in polka-dot threads. One adjacent biddy glared. Other jane raised her eyes heavenward while putting on virtuous expression. The blondie buttonholed the chrmn.

"Mr. Tate, I slaved and slaved to prepare my gherkins. A special recipe. Can't I enter another jar?"

Tate's collar line displayed red. "Now, Mrs. James, I certainly sympathize with you in this real unusual situation. But one entry and one only is the rule. No offense meant, but we have to stick to the regulations because somebody who wanted the Blue Ribbon could accidentally bust their jar, for instance, then bring in one from a better batch at the last minute. I'm real sorry."

Blondie steamed. "I suppose you're trying to imply that my pickles spoiled and I'm just accusing somebody else as an excuse. Well, I *am* accusing somebody, Mr. Tate. I've learned how some narrow-minded people in this town welcome newcomers."

"Too bad," whispered Unc, "she's right."

One of the older femmes, an awl-nosed gray-haired character type with floral handbag and geranium-pot headgear, declaimed, "Well, Miz James, since you're so snippy about it, it's no secret that ever since you and your husband moved to Weevers it's been push, push, push."

"Ladies!" said Tate. "Unless we get to the bottom of this, the pickle contest will be ruined. Pinky, what do you think?"

"Well, this may not be a crime for Sheriff Gus Gumley. On the other hand, it certainly may be a crime. And I go along with never

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having seen sweet gherkins spoil so they turn that weird color. Maybe someone did doctor them. Let's investigate."

"Investigate to your heart's content, Pinkerton," said Lulu Clark. "I didn't do it. But why do we have to have shoddy carnival people from the midway eavesdropping?"

"Lulu," said Unc, "this is my nephew Woodrow Ennis."

"My stars!"

"I used to take piano lessons from your husband at the music store, Mrs. Clark. Don't you remember?" I said.

"Yes, and I remember you never practiced, either."

"I remember you, Woodrow," put in the other femme. She was a bulky number with active eyebrows, fencepost legs, and dimpling smile. She waltzed over, gladhanded me. "I've followed your career with interest, as I'm the President of the Weevers Drama Guild. Last May we presented one of Victor Herbert's operas. I sang the leading role. I truly wish you could have been present."

"Likewise," I mumbled, masking divers shudders at thought of her heft in ingenue role.

Mrs. Marvella Bemis appeared to accept kayo in the cucumber derby with good grace, though. She continued to pump my mitt with one white glove, stated she'd had her share of ribbons, so share and share alike.

Unc was busy prying at the lid of the bollixed jar. "I wonder what might have been added to spoil—say." He blinked. "Come to think of it, Woodrow, where's your Aunt?"

Tate spaketh: "She said the heat in here was getting her, Pinky. She went to lie down a minute." He indicated in direction of entrances to Ladies' and Gents' in nearby wall.

Nodding, Unc unpried the glass lid. "Mighty peculiar. No odd smell. Just pickle aroma."

"But they'd never win looking like that!" the deejay's blondie caterwauled.

"I repeat, 'twasn't me," said Mrs. Lulu Clark.

"Nor me," put in Marvella Bemis. "After all, since I have won nine blue ribbons, why on *earth*—" Whap! Simultaneous with oration, she dished out theatrical gesture which unfortunately banged her right glove against the jar Unc was grasping. Doll did impromptu terp routine trying to get out of way, but was too late. Scarlet sauce from the jug decorated her glove with deep stains.

"Golly, Marvella, I'm sure sorry," Unc said.

"Oh, don't fret, Pinkerton, it's an old pair." So saying, she peeled off both items, stuffed same in handbag. She must have cut her right thumb as she sported a Band-Aid.

"Land to Goshen, it's Woodrow!" Aunt Ellen appeared, all flustered and patting her gray bun

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and adjusting her specs. "If this isn't the most amazing surprise."

Following buss, I said, "Just in time for some boffo material, too. Don't forget, county fairs are still a big source of coin for vaude vets."

"Woodrow, must you use that shameful entertainment jargon? Especially when things are in such a stew? And—Woodrow! Where did you get that coat?" Sad expresh in Aunt E.'s optics indicated I was doubtless on the primrose path. Time to change subject.

"Aunt Ellen, I really dig those nifty vitamin pills you sent me. I belt—er, take them every day."

"I should hope so, prowling around in dingy dens night after night the way you do. What's your Uncle up to?"

We departed stage center, then discussed mystery in low tones from the wings.

Aunt E. said, "Just look at Lulu Clark smile! I'll bet she was the one who did it. Oh, if only I hadn't raved so much about those gherkins yesterday. Now don't you raise your eyebrow that way, Woodrow. You may not put much stock in this back there among all your shimmying dancers and spicy-talking comedians that you're forced to associate with, but here in Weevers, a Blue Ribbon for pickles carries a lot of prestige."

"Zap! Plot perils prestigious pickle preem!"

"Woodrow, do you feel faint?"

"Just setting up a headline for—hey, what's up now?"

Posthaste I adjourned after Tate. Same was headed for spot where Unc was confabbing with young guy displaying Sam Browne, WELCOME TO FAIR VISITORS badge, large comb in shirt pocket, pompadour and sideburns all tonicked up, plus obtuse visage.

"Who's he?" I asked Tate, catching up. "He's posing like an r&r star."

"Beg pardon?"

"Sorry, rock and roller."

According to Tate, type was yclept Snooky Russell. He was the youngest Deputy Sheriff staffer for Unc's pal Gus Gumley and was allowed to earn moonlighting shekels as small-hours guard in Exhibition Hall.

"Snooky's all right," said Tate, "though a mite thick. Everybody in Weevers kind of laughs about his habits, too. They all know he's vain as a peacock."

"—pretty doggone tired," Snooky was saying as we arrived. He scowled, flicked non-existent lint spex from sleeve. "But I stuck around 'cause LeRoy here said you might want to ask me some questions."

"Appreciate it, Snooky. Were you on duty the whole night?"

"The whole night," said Snooky. "The heat in here was something fierce. Knocks a crease to pieces." He seemed pretty broken up about it, pointing to his trouser legs.

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"Snooky, there are only two entrances to this hall, the ones on either side of the building at the ends of this main aisle. Now think hard. Did you see anybody come in or go out after closing time?"

"Not a soul come in. Some people did leave round 10:00. But it was just Floyd Bemis and the workmen helping him set up his booth at the last minute. They didn't go nowhere near the pickles."

This info was dispensed in somewhat absent-minded style, as Snooky was swiveling his head, beetling his brows, etc., etc., as though scanning premises for a friend.

Next question from Unc established that all the hall booths had been erected per sked on Mon. except the one belonging to Bemis. He was delayed until Tues. by a case of summer grippe. But Snooky said he was positive the sweet gherkins had not been doctored by the time Bemis and his bunch flew the coop, since Snooky was big on pickles and had passed the display at Fair foldup hour.

"After Floyd went home, Snooky, are you sure nobody could have sneaked in here without you spotting them?"

"I set on a stool in this here center aisle, from which I could view both those doors which were wide open on account of the blasted heat, and nobody went in or out all night." Still doing the frown bit, Snooky had whipped out comb and passed it through his locks during foregoing reportage.

"And you didn't leave the building at any time?"

"I did not leave this here building at any time whatsoever. My orders were to stay put."

Unc sighed. "All right, Snooky. Thanks."

Tate said, "What next?"

"Well, LeRoy, I still have a hunch somebody did come in here and fiddle with those gherkins."

"But how?"

"That's just it, LeRoy, I don't know. Snooky saw nobody. He didn't go outside the building. He —hold on."

Unc developed that thoughtful, cross-eyed look. He did slow glom of entire hall. Followed this with a foxy smile.

"Woodrow, can you locate your Aunt and that pixilated pickle jar?"

I stuffed away my notepad and hoofed. Secs later, Unc held the jar, said to Aunt E., "Now, this jar still smells like pickles, but it looks like beets. I'm no great shakes in the kitchen department. I need some help. Here in Weevers, I don't expect the ladies have any peculiar, exotic chemicals handy. So can you think of anything simple and ordinary that would turn pickle juice this color?"

Aunt E. rotated jar. "Land sakes, Pinkerton, I've been so flustered I hadn't thought about—oh. Why, yes. Food coloring would. Ordi-

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nary red grocery-store food coloring. It wouldn't change the aroma, but it would change the color."

"Who'd have such around the house?"

"Most any housewife who fancies herself a cook. I have some."

"If you spill some does it stain?"

"It surely does."

Unc zipped off, all in pursuit. By exhibit table, Betty James was doing the hanky sniff, Mrs. Lulu C. was still registering beaucoup smalltown savoir faire, Mrs. M. Bemis was showing boredom with whole biz.

Unc said, "Marvella, you spilled some of the red juice from this jar on your glove. Could I please see that glove a minute?"

"Why, of course, Pinkerton." With her right hand she pulled out glove, handed same over.

Unc did a thoughtful study of the glove's general appearance, passed it back.

"Why did you want it, Pinkerton?" said Mrs. B.

"Oh, I didn't actually want the glove, Marvella. I just wanted to check whether you were right-handed or left-handed." Unc shook his head. "Marvella, I'm surely saddened to say this, but there is nothing in the whole world worse than doing something unkind because of some silly notion about prestige or status. Life is just too blamed short for getting all knotted up over things which don't even exist in the long run."

"I dislike your tone, Pinkerton."

LeRoy Tate seemed to be doing a nervous-type soft shoe. "Uh, Pinky, remember Marvella's brother is a lawyer. It wouldn't do to—uh—antagonize—"

"Calm down, LeRoy. Snooky, would you request those few folks watching down at the end of the aisle to step along? I don't think we want to make a broadcast." Per request, Snooky ditched his comb and carried out mission.

"See here, Pinkerton," said Mrs. B., "just what has my right hand got to do with anything? And what did you mean by those other remarks?"

"Though I regret to say it, Marvella, I'm sure your right hand is the hand you'd use to pour something into something else. Say, some red food coloring into a batch of sweet gherkins, knowing the awful color alone would knock those gherkins right out of the running."

"I've never heard such outrageous—Pinkerton, I told you several times I don't care a speck about the Blue Ribbon. Not a speck."

Unc leaned on the pickle table, giving out with the wrinkled-brow look. "So you did. However, I think that runs contrary to what the normal reaction would be from a lady who's won first prize nine years in a row. It strikes me that a lifelong Weevers resident would kind of resent a newcomer stealing

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her laurels. Though it's true you've repeated over and over that you don't care, you're one of the leading lights in the Weevers Drama Guild, and we are all aware that means you have the ability to—as my nephew'd put it—thesp."

While dame began zing imitation of steam engine blowing valves, Unc continued to play it with max politeness.

"Of course, Marvella, what I just said is hardly grounds for more than suspicion, since Lulu Clark here is also a prize pickler, and she freely admits she was peeved. But certain other things suggest—oh, by the way, Lulu. Where were you last evening after ten o'clock?"

"Sitting at home on the front porch with Herman, if that's any of your affair, you old busybody."

Unc remained big in the restraint dept. "At home, eh? But your husband, Marvella, was down at the lodge playing pinochle for a good while after 10:30. I know, I was there myself. So nobody could have checked on whether you drove back here to the Fairgrounds."

"Of all the ridiculous, stupid, meddlesome—Pinkerton, I suggest you see a doctor."

"I'd a lot rather see what's under that Band-Aid on your right thumb, Marvella. If a person dribbled a little red food coloring on a thumb, which could happen since a person usually pours using thumb and index finger, it could stain. We all saw the bad stain it left on your glove."

"Unc," I protested, "that's too far out! She probably just has a cut."

"Could be. On the other hand, Woodrow, maybe you've misinterpreted the basic purpose of a Band-Aid. Now just what is that purpose?"

"To heal cuts or scrapes, natch."

"Woodrow, the purpose is to cover up a cut or scrape so that it'll heal itself. The purpose, I repeat, is to *cover up* a cut or scrape —or something else—say, on the order of a red stain."

Mrs. B. twitched her right hand behind her back, realized mistake, did lotsa sputtering. However, poor Unc this time had left a blank which opened the way for a last-act bomb.

"Unc, Snooky swears he didn't leave the building!"

"I dint," Snooky said.

"But Unc, he had to ankle outside in order for one or both of those egresses to be unwatched, so some party could sneak in and do what you just said."

"Woodrow, where I got into trouble was with the kind of careless way I asked my questions. Guess I'd better do it again. Snooky, did you at any time leave this hall?"

"No, sir, I did not go outside of this here hall—not even once."

"But Snooky, did you at any time leave your *post*?"

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"No, I did not—well, I mean, only—"

Before double-taking minion of the law could continue, Unc said, "Don't feel bad. You were telling the exact gospel truth the first time. Probably you've got into such a habit, no offense meant, you did what you did unconsciously. Or almost."

"What kind of tripe are you peddling now, Pinkerton?" said Mrs. B.

"Stop play-acting, Marvella. Anybody who's been around Weevers a while—which includes you—knows Snooky likes to keep natty. Why, twice already this morning I saw him comb his hair."

"Can't do it proper without a mirror, though," said subject under discussion.

"Exactly, Snooky. I noticed just a while back you were kind of frowning and looking about for one." I'd seen that, all right, but like a dodo had figured object of optical search was a person. "What I'm saying is, Marvella came back here late last night, feeling pretty certain that if she hid outside, it wouldn't be long before you went to do the comb operation in the one type of place that is literally not outside the building at all, yet is without doubt completely cut off from the hall by a door, and like all such places, has a mirror as standard equipment. Namely that gentlemen's washroom plainly visible over there along that wall."

Did I feel bum! I'd spotted both doors when Tate said Aunt E. had gone to lie down and escape the heat.

Snooky beeted. "Heck, I didn't think that counted. I mean, it's not *out*side. I wasn't gone more'n a minute or so, either. And I didn't want to say nothing 'cause I wasn't supposed to budge from the stool in the aisle."

"Don't fret, Snooky. You won't get in Dutch. You felt guilty just now because you're a conscientious lad who believes in following orders. But you've served the cause of justice right well."

"Justice!" This from the guilty party who'd been simmering. "Blast you, Pinkerton. Blast you and your justice and your meddling! Did you think I'd stand for the floozy wife of a Johnny-come-lately taking away my position as *oh!* Oh, my, where's Floyd? *Floyd!"* Entering Tearsville, she ankled.

"Take over, LeRoy," said Unc. "Now that the crime is exposed, I don't believe you need do more than bend the rule this once and allow Mrs. James to enter a new jar. Woodrow, let's stroll outside and I'll buy you and your Aunt Ellen a weenie."

After Unc had copped kudos from grateful platter-spinner's frau, plus more dirty looks from Mrs. Lulu who went to console Marvella, Aunt Ellen said, "Poor Marvella. She'll get all the punish-

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ment she needs from wagging tongues. What a spiteful thing to do!"

Under the tent at the refreshment center sponsored by the Odd Fellows Ladies Aux., I presented Aunt E. with the giftie which I had fetched from the car.

"My, isn't this a pretty ribbon, Woodrow. And inside—land sakes, just look at it! Why, it's a—it's—well, it certainly is attractive."

"It's an ashtray," I said. "From Le Finkrat Club. Uh, that's a sort of 'in' bistro—I mean, I brought it all the way from—I thought it'd make a nice conversation piece—er—I mean I hoped—oh, rats."

Aunt Ellen said, "Woodrow, it's wonderful. Even if it does come from one of those wick—that is, from the Eastern seaboard. We folks in Weevers need to broaden our viewpoint. Don't look so downcast. You know how much you mean to your Uncle Pinkerton and me."

Big squeeze.

It sure felt good.

"I second that," grinned Unc. "I might even say that our pleasure at seeing you this canto is lofty, mighty, and wow."

"Woodrow! Cancel his free subscription the minute you get back to New York!"

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The second "new and hitherto unchronicled adventure of Poe's Dupin" —a pastiche reverently conceived and faithfully executed by the British historian, cryptanalyst, and archeologist, Michael Harrison . . . How once again an eminent member of the Government calls upon C. Auguste Dupin—this time to ask for help in an international crisis . . . an unusual blend of the whodunit, howdunit, and whydunit, spanning in this "brief compass" the entire evolution of the detective story, from its invention by Poe to the latest emphasis on theme—for here is a spy story, not of 1965 but of the early 19th Century . . .

THE MYSTERY OF THE FULTON DOCUMENTS

another "hitherto unpublished" tale of C. Auguste Dupin

by MICHAEL HARRISON

THOUGH DUPIN HAD BEEN WARNED TO EXPECT A CALLER OF EMINENT position, the Minister, when he arrived, did not even send in his card. The first that we knew of his visit, on that gloomy evening in the November of 18—, was the sound of his footsteps on the old wooden staircase. "I am expected," was all that he would say to Hyacinthe, our man-servant; but that imperturbable domestic is too accustomed to the crochets of both Dupin and his clients to insist on the *minutiae* of the social formalities. Without more ado, Hyacinthe led the way upstairs, to our comfortable little back library, or book-closet, *au troisième,* No. 33, Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain.

Never regarded, even by his most bitter enemies, as other than the personification of prudence, the Minister waited until Hyacinthe had closed the door behind him before bowing haughtily to Dupin, and murmuring, "You will naturally know my name. I think, though, that there will be no need to use it. What I have been recommended by Monsieur G—— to confide in you is of so dangerous a nature—I refer, of course, to its power to harm the Kingdom of France—that the more

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impersonal we may keep this meeting, Monsieur, the less risk there will be of this affair's coming to unauthorized ears."

"I understand," said Dupin coldly. "This is by no means the first time that I have been asked to respect State secrets. I have only to add, for your further assurance, that my friend here is entirely in my confidence —and in that of Monsieur G—— also."

"Indeed, indeed," said the Minister, a little more warmly. It was obvious that for all his haughty, frigid manner he had a tender regard for his own career, and was now somewhat nervous that he might have provoked Dupin into an unsympathetic attitude. "Monsieur G—— said as much to me. But, you understand, I am more than ordinarily troubled in this—"

"Perhaps, Baron," said Dupin, with a briskly business-like air which caused the Minister's eyes to open wide, "you would acquaint us with the details of your problem."

Recalled to a sense of reality by Dupin's manner, the Baron, without further hesitation, told the following extraordinary tale.

"In case you are not acquainted with the name of the American, Robert Fulton—ah! I see that you are. Well, then, you will know that after the Revolution which gave the North American colonists their independence of Great Britain, a veritable invasion of Europe took place—a sort of emigration in reverse. Painters, authors, engineers—all flocked to Europe. Great Britain received the largest proportion of this American exportation of talent; but France, in view of the close links between this country and the young American Republic, was not neglected. Many of the Americans, indeed, took their talent to both countries—Great Britain and France. As a painter and an engineer, Robert Fulton shone brightest among this galaxy of talent.

"It was he who sailed the first steam-boat on French waters. It was he who invented the submersible vessel, the *Nautilus,* and with it proved that one might explode a bomb beneath a ship at sea. But, as you doubtless know, the late Emperor conceived for this Fulton and his inventions the most unreasonable dislike. He ordered Count Caffarelli, the then Maritime Prefect of Brest, who had sanctioned Fulton's experiments in blowing up ships, to discontinue the experiments; and Fulton, at a moment's notice, was packed off to England, from which country, again after successful experiments, witnessed by representatives of the British Admiralty, he was again expelled—this time to go back to his native land.

"Now I come to the purpose of my visit. Fulton had invented—so he claimed—a weapon of entirely novel principle and of unprecedented pow-

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er. He had made arrangements with Caffarelli to demonstrate this 'ultra' weapon—but Fouché's police put a stop to those arrangements. In brief: Fulton was compelled to leave his plans behind—the plans of the Master Weapon, as he called it—and the documents have remained, in a sealed envelope, in a locked safe, ever since."

"And now somebody has opened the sealed envelope," Dupin murmured. "Who is this person?"

"A senior confidential clerk."

"Suspected of disloyalty to the *régime?*"

"Not so far as we know."

"Then living beyond his means?"

"It may be so, though, as he has a private income, such a suspicion is difficult to corroborate."

"How do you know that it was he who opened the safe and the sealed envelope?"

For the first time the Minister showed a decided embarrassment. It appeared almost as though the habitually fluent Minister was at a sudden loss for words. Certainly he was having great difficulty in putting what he wished to say into speech.

"*Hem! Hem!* Well, the fact is, gentlemen, that the clerk—let us say, rather, that it was not he who opened the safe and the seal, but the Head of his Department—"

"How then does the clerk enter into all this?"

"Well—*hem!*—the Head of the Department opened both only at the clerk's urgent request."

"This is droll," Dupin commented. "The Head of a Department opens a confidential file at the urgent request of his clerk!"

"The story is, indeed, curious, Monsieur Dupin—but not, perhaps, as inexplicable as it might at first sound. The clerk, Fulgence Rouvier, put in a written request to see the Head of the Department, Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt, on a private matter of the utmost urgency. The prescribed forms were scrupulously followed—Rouvier is a confidential clerk, second grade, and as such he is entitled to request a personal interview with his *Chef de Bureau*. The interview was granted, and Rouvier astounded Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt by confessing that he had been tempted more than once to open and read the secret Fulton documents."

"You say that Rouvier admitted he had been tempted. Did he also confess that he had yielded to the temptation?"

"No, indeed. He said that he had been tempted by intense curiosity, that he had resisted, and that, to the best of his knowledge and belief, nothing was missing from the Fulton *dossier*."

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"Then why did he have to tell Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt anything at all? This clerk of yours must have an exceedingly tender conscience! We are none of us morally liable for temptation—only for giving way to it."

"Indeed—but there is something more. Rouvier, in his capacity of confidential clerk, has access to the key of the safe—quite properly so, you understand. Normally, he has not the right to open the safe; but in certain exceptional circumstances—all of which are carefully described in the official Regulations Governing the Civil Service—he may do so.

"I explain this to make clearer the reasons that Rouvier gave for insisting—yes, that is the word I use, insisting—that his *Chef de Bureau* cause the safe to be opened, and the sealed packet to be unsealed.

"Rouvier explained that his intense longing to see what Fulton had left behind might have preyed on his mind during sleep. He said that, while working for his civil service examinations, he had become afflicted with somnambulism—on one occasion, he told Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt, he had been found, fully dressed, trying to gain admittance to the hall in which the examinations were to be held. As it was three o'clock in the morning, the affair—so Rouvier said—caused some amusement."

Dupin puffed reflectively on his meerschaum. "And now," he observed, "Rouvier believes that, somnambulistically, he might have gone to his office, taken the key, opened the safe, broken the seal of this most secret document, and—ah, I see! In replacing the envelope he might have—still as a sleepwalker—removed some or all of the sheets making up Fulton's formula for Armageddon? Precisely so. That was what, Baron, you meant just now when you said that Rouvier insisted on the safe's being opened, and the papers examined. This was done, of course? The *dossier* was scrutinized, sheet by sheet—you number each sheet?"

"Oh, yes—and repeat a few words from the bottom of each sheet to the top of the next, so that any break caused by removal of a sheet is doubly checked. And again, the total number of each sheet's lines, as well as the total number of sheets, are entered on the cover in which the *dossier* is enclosed."

"Very well, then—all was examined. Tell me, was the seal intact?"

"Yes. But Rouvier professed himself as being not entirely satisfied. 'Who knows,' he said to Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt, 'I could have opened the packet and carefully restored the seal—' "

"All in his sleep, my dear Baron!"

"Yes, I confess it seems rather far-fetched. But by this time Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt was as eager to check the contents of the packet as

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was Rouvier. But nothing was missing. The packet was resealed, the safe relocked—and there we are!"

"Save for one thing," Dupin murmured drily. "In spite of what you have told me, you are of the opinion that a certain Chancellery has obtained possession of the Fulton secret. I venture to suggest that the Dutch Government has shown a sudden and bold obstinacy in the matter of this new nation that the Great Powers propose to create? And you, seeking a reason for this stiffening of the Dutch attitude, think you may have found it in a betrayal of the Fulton plans. But even if Holland refused to part with her western provinces to help form this new kingdom, how dangerous could Holland be—against the combined might of France, Great Britain, Prussia, and Austria?"

"On land—very little. By sea—possibly a great deal. And what if this secret of Fulton's should put overwhelming power into Dutch hands?"

"Well," said Dupin calmly, "you would have the secret, too. Forces would be evenly balanced, eh?"

"But—but—we don't know what the secret is! It's in some sort of cipher or code, and though our *Cabinet Noir* had it in their hands at the time of Fulton's sudden departure, they could not penetrate to its meaning."

"We may do better with this new generation of cryptographers," said Dupin idly. "Would it be convenient for you, Baron, to admit us to the Department in which Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt so considerately disciplines Rouvier? I should like to go, step by step, through the procedure adopted by the *Chef de Bureau* when Rouvier confessed that he might —just *might,* mark you!—have been sleepwalking."

Though the Minister had come to the Rue Dunôt in a plain closed carriage, whose panels and hammercloth bore no coat-of-arms, and whose coachman and footman were not in livery, the man's excessive prudence had not permitted him to let this undistinguished vehicle remain before our house. However, a shrill peep-peep on the whistle mounted in the head of the Baron's walking-cane, and the sound of hooves striking the cobbles of the Ruelle de Ste. Virginie came to our ears; in a moment the carriage had drawn up at our side; in a few moments more we were all inside, the blinds drawn down, and the thoroughbred English bays stepping out briskly for the Ministry.

As we drove through the foggy evening toward the Quai du Louvre, the Minister told us briefly what G——'s agents had been able to discover of the private life of Fulgence Rouvier, the confidential clerk. In truth, it was little enough. Rouvier was unmarried. He lived in a mod-

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est house on the Asnieres Road, beyond the fortifications, with a widowed maternal aunt, who managed the household. He had no vices, though he liked a game of billiards or *écarté* at his club or at one of the more respectable cafés in the neighborhood of the Place Vendôme or the Louvre. He had contracted no irregular entanglements, and was not in debt. Only one fact in this somewhat unexciting record of a dismally uneventful life caused Dupin to betray the least sign of interest.

"It seems," said the Baron, "that of late Rouvier has been often in the company of a certain Monsieur van der Weyer, a man of about thirty-five years of age, who is the agent, in Paris, of a large firm of Dutch textile manufacturers. This Monsieur van der Weyer is of rather better extraction than his commercial employment would imply: his family are considerable landowners in the province of Limbourg, which, if the proposed new kingdom is established, will pass from the sovereignty of the House of Orange to that of—well, we haven't yet decided who the new king will be; but Monsieur van der Weyer and his family will become the subjects of a new monarch."

"This could be news of profound importance," said Dupin.

"You think that—?"

"I could not possibly say until I had seen and spoken to this Rouvier."

"You should do that almost immediately. I fancy that the bells on our left are those of St. Germain l'Auxerrois. Gentlemen, we are nearly there."

That our meeting took place in the Minister's private office, to which even the Heads of Department were rarely summoned, might sufficiently have accounted for the nervousness of the clerk, Rouvier, a tall, dark-haired man dressed in bottle-green English cloth. But Dupin, I could see, believed that there were other, and deeper, causes for the confidential clerk's nervousness.

When all but Rouvier were seated, the Minister said, in his customary haughty manner, "Let us begin this conference with no ambiguities or misapprehensions what-so-ev-er—none what-so-ev-er! This is a Court of Enquiry, called to examine the *very* grave matter of which Monsieur Rouvier appears to be, not merely the center, but the cause.

"To assist this Court of Enquiry—that I now formally convene, though nothing will be taken down in writing at this stage—I have invited Monsieur le Chevalier Dupin and his friend to be present. Rouvier, you will place yourself entirely at Monsieur Dupin's disposal—whatever he chooses to ask, you will answer. Is that completely understood?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Ministre."

"Very well, then. Monsieur Dupin, the witness is yours."

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"I have but one question to ask here," said Dupin, "for I wish to reconstruct the events on the scene, as they happened. Monsieur Rouvier, is there *Le Dictionnaire Encyclopedique* in this building—"

"Oh, but there is, Monsieur," cried Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt. "It is in the outer office, and available to all."

"Well then, Monsieur Rouvier, did you turn up the entry, 'Fulton, Robert,' in the dictionary?"

Plainly, our good Rouvier suspected a trap. Equally, he could not see in what the trap consisted. One could almost hear his mind weighing the question: "Shall I? Shall I not?" At last he said, with a touch of the defiant in his manner, "Yes, Monsieur, I did. Is there anything wrong in that?"

"I am asking the questions this evening," said Dupin, with gentle authority. "One may become fascinated by a dictionary. One turns up one word, and then one finds oneself following, as it were, a chain of thought. *Fulton, Funambule, Somnambule*—and talking of somnambulism, the dictionary records a classic case of this strange malady, identical in every respect with your own. Were you not struck by the similarity, Monsieur Rouvier?"

"I—I did not look up the word, Monsieur."

"Upon my soul! Then you must! You would be *most* interested to find how very much alike all you somnambulists are. And now, if Your Excellency will arrange for me to see the *locus operandi*—?"

"You opened the safe, Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt—show me, please. Yes—and took out the Fulton *dossier*—take it out, please—and carried it over to—ah, to this table—pray do exactly what you did that night—and laid it down, *so!* One small point, Monsieur: you say that *you* carried the envelope from the safe to the table. Forgive me, but as you are by far the senior—"

"Excuse me, Monsieur!" cried Rouvier. "As the junior, it was my duty only if Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt requested me to carry the *dossier*. But often, normal procedure is reversed by the importance of the papers to be handled."

"I fully comprehend," said Dupin. "And you, Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt, laid it down on this table. Did Monsieur Rouvier touch it at all?"

"Not once, sir!" Rouvier cried.

"But that is not so!" said the *Chef de Bureau,* angrily. "You most certainly did touch it! You laid it—or, rather, when *I* had laid it down on the table, you picked it up, placed it very neatly in the middle of

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the table, and began to turn the pages, one by one, very slowly. I distinctly remember—"

"I thought the gentleman meant, had I touched the envelope before it was laid on the table. Of course, I touched it *after*."

It was Dupin who changed the subject in a dramatic fashion, though his voice was sufficiently quiet as he asked, "Who ordered this table to be secured to the floor by these small collars of wood at the bottom of the legs?"

No one, apparently. Dupin requested that the assistant to the concierge, who looked after such odd jobs, be sent for. The man declared his complete ignorance of the matter.

"This is most mysterious," said the Minister. "Who could have done it? And why should a table be fixed in a certain position?"

"I can think of a number of reasons," said Dupin. He raised his head, and stared keenly at the age-stained ceiling. "For instance, by fixing the table, it would be kept in view of that small spy-hole in the ceiling."

There was an uproar! Everyone crowded to stare up at the hole, now plainly visible, as the porter, at a word from Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt, moved the lamp so as to cast its light on the ceiling.

"This is infamous!" cried the Minister. "Who occupies the room above?"

"No one, sir," said the porter. "It contains a lot of old boxes and such-like trash. No one's been in it for years. But I have the key here, sir, on my ring, if you gentlemen were thinking of inspecting the room."

But, as we came to the door of the room above, Dupin said, "We may look, since we are here. But it is clear, as the porter says, that no one has put a key in this lock for years. The spy-hole was made by some one who stood on the table. If we look carefully, we may find grains of white plaster that have fallen from the ceiling. We may also find scratches on the table's polished top—scratches made by the boots of the person who stood on the table to bore a hole into the ceiling. But it is not for these things that we are looking. We are looking for something far more important. Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt, we shall not need the porter further."

When the man had taken himself off, Dupin added, "Let us go back into His Excellency's office—with his permission—so that I can tell you the truth about the affair of the Fulton Documents." Almost, it seemed, as an afterthought he said, "Oh, and Monsieur Rouvier, please be good enough to bring the Fulton *dossier* in with you."

"Let me say, first of all," said Dupin, when the door of the Minister's office had been closed upon our company, "that it was no spy-hole in the ceiling. What it is I shall explain in good time. I first connected the

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stationing of the table in a certain position and the seeming spy-hole above with an attempt to obtain photographs of the pages as Monsieur Rouvier very carefully turned them in the view of the photographic-artist above.

"But the room above had obviously not been entered. The tiny hole drilled into the plaster of the ceiling had, therefore, been made for some other purpose.

"Let us now examine with some care the portfolio which is at the center of this affair—the famous Fulton *dossier*. Let us open it once more—breaking the seal, thus—and, gentlemen, let me assure you that it does not matter a jot whether or not the seal is genuine! Well—just as I thought—see, Monsieur le Ministre: sheets of blank paper!"

The Minister and the Head of the Department started in horror.

"Great God!" the Minister cried. "Where, then, are the originals?"

"Where you suspected a copy might be—with the Foreign Ministry of the Kingdom of Holland. May I remind you that the 'unlikely culprit' is a device of writers of fiction; here, in real life, the culprit is likely to be the likely one—Monsieur Rouvier."

"I absolutely deny it!" said the confidential clerk. "Do you also accuse Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt? No? Then he himself saw me put the *dossier* back into the envelope, and he himself not only applied the seal, but he carried the sealed envelope to the safe, and locked the safe himself. Is that not so, Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt? There, Excellency and gentlemen: you see that my respected Head of Department confirms my innocence!"

"He cannot do that, Monsieur Rouvier," said Dupin, "because you are *not* innocent. You are demonstrably guilty. Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt *did,* certainly, examine every page of the Fulton *dossier,* and he certainly saw the *dossier* replaced, first in its wrapper, and then in its envelope. But the envelope that he sealed was not the one which contained the Fulton *dossier.*

"Follow me, gentlemen," said Dupin, opening the door and walking through to the outer office, where we had examined the table. He pointed to a small hole in the panel of the door. "Another hole, you see.

"Now attend me well. Monsieur Rouvier had to trick his Head into opening the safe and into getting out the Fulton documents. The rather absurd story of the somnambulism was suggested to him by his turning to the world in the dictionary—as I pointed out.

"However, the story itself did not matter: its sole purpose was to get Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt to open the safe—and this he did. The preparation of a duplicate or dummy packet was easy: all the particulars which

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are written on the envelope of a *dossier* deposited in the safe are also recorded in the office index. The envelopes are of standard Government type, and a seal is a seal—any confidential clerk can always lay his hand on one; the wax and tapers are on every desk.

"But exactly what did Monsieur Rouvier do? Let me tell you, gentlemen. There is always something beautiful in effective simplicity!

"One night, while working late, Monsieur Rouvier made two significant additions to the furnishings of this room. He screwed a small eye, probably painted white, into the ceiling, just over the table—where, gentlemen, it looked as if some one had contrived a small spy-hole. Then, to make sure the table could not be moved, he fitted the little wooden collars to the bottom of the legs, thus securing the table in position.

"Next, he screwed a small eye, probably painted brown, into the panel of the door here. Now, all he needed to engineer the theft of the Fulton *dossier,* and to have the unimpeachable witness of Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt to swear that the *dossier* was returned to the safe and locked away, was—a few yards of common black pack-thread and a small piece of cobbler's wax.

"It is all clear now? Surely the clews point to the inevitable solution? No? Then permit me to unriddle the riddle.

"Monsieur Rouvier tied one end of the thread to the eye screwed into the door panel and passed the almost invisible thread up to and through the eye in the ceiling, letting the ceiling end hang about eight feet above the floor—Monsieur Rouvier, you have observed, is a tall man. With the cobbler's wax in his coat pocket, Rouvier was then ready for the final act of prestidigitation.

"While Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt was fetching the *dossier* from the safe—his back conveniently turned—Monsieur Rouvier quietly opened the door wide. As the Head of the Department bent over the *dossier,* Rouvier slowly turned the sheets of paper—not to permit an accomplice overhead to photograph the pages, but simply to allow enough time for his other hand to melt the wax and knead it into easily manageable plasticity.

"When the Head of the Department examined the last page and saw, to his great satisfaction, that nothing had been abstracted from the precious file, he replaced the *dossier* in its envelope and put the envelope on the table for resealing. At that moment—he timed it to perfection—Monsieur Rouvier made some such remark as 'What a draft is coming through that door!'—ah, you recall the trifling incident, Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt! And at that moment the Head of the Department would

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not have been human if, for a second or two, he had not taken his eyes from the envelope on the table.

"But those seconds were enough for Monsieur Rouvier to bring out the soft wax from his pocket, reach above him for the end of the thread, and quickly fasten it to the *dossier* by means of the wax. Then, all in one smooth motion, Monsieur Rouvier proceeded to shut the door, with Monsieur Geoffroy-Schmidt undoubtedly watching—ah, you did, Monsieur! such a natural thing to do—and as the door closed, the tension on the thread caused the *dossier* to rise to the ceiling."

"If only I had glanced upwards!" the Head of the Department exclaimed.

"But you did not, my good sir! For this dummy envelope, which Monsieur Rouvier had hidden inside his coat and then placed on the table just before closing the door, was ready for your resealing.

"You resealed the dummy envelope, placed it in the safe, and returned to your office, leaving Monsieur Rouvier free to collect the *dossier* from under the ceiling and, unobserved, to remove the home-made apparatus by which this time-honored trick, known among thieves as the 'switch,' was so neatly effected. Do not look so astonished, gentlemen: the secret of Monsieur Rouvier's extraordinary dexterity is quite simply—practice. Any room with a door and a ceiling will give one the opportunity for such practice. Am I right, Monsieur Rouvier?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Chevalier," said the clerk resignedly. "You are right. I expect, sir, that knowing so much, you also know my reason?"

"You mean," said the Minister, in anger and contempt, "you know why this man committed treason? Why he handed over a powerful weapon to another State?"

"You go too fast, Excellency," said Dupin. "You should, like me, cultivate an ear for regional accents. You come, I take it, Monsieur Rouvier, from—Courtrai, perhaps? You do? And that lies in territory which is to be ceded by France to the new kingdom? Precisely! And after having met Monsieur van der Weyer, you found that you had interests in common—and concocted a plot to give Holland a weapon that would strengthen her arm against the Powers which sought to rob her of her western provinces? Surely, Excellency, one may sympathize with a man who wishes to keep his native town French?"

"And sympathize with him when, in order to achieve that, he puts a deadly military secret at the disposal of others? *Really,* Monsieur!"

Dupin said quietly, "It is neither a secret nor deadly."

"But Holland's sudden obstinacy! Her open defiance!"

"Oh, I don't doubt that, until the Dutch military cryptographers reveal

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otherwise, Holland believes she has truly acquired the Master Weapon. But, consider, Excellency—calmly regard the facts and make the legitimate deductions.

"Robert Fulton, expelled from both France and Britain, returned to his native land, America. Soon afterwards, he was called upon to place his inventive genius at the service of his own country—on the brink of war with Great Britain. Do you imagine, for one moment, that Fulton would not have used the so-called secret contained in the *dossier* that Monsieur Rouvier has passed over to the Dutch?

"Now, since the only important inventive work that Fulton accomplished in the Anglo-American War was the building of a vast floating battery, for the protection of the harbor of New York, I think we may safely conclude that it was the plans for such a floating battery which were contained in the missing file."

"But we have had—every civilized nation has had—such floating batteries for the past quarter of a century," exclaimed the Minister. "Is *that* what all the fuss is about!"

"That," said Dupin, "and the fact that Monsieur Rouvier, a loyal Frenchman, would prefer to remain French. But that is something that you, Excellency, will have to settle without my assistance. Good-night, Excellency, and gentlemen!"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 283rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . "Bloehm's Wall" is a tremendously impressive "first story"—one of the finest "firsts" to appear in EQMM . . .

The author, George Emmett, is in his mid-thirties. He has always wanted to write—he did write for school publications, and then stopped. He spent his 16th summer hitchhiking in Mexico, then "drifted through a dreary cycle of creative-fringe jobs—movie studio, advertising agency, etc."

At 21 he was "hired for the cabin crew of an international airliner," and "during these superbly 'wasted' airline years," Mr. Emmett traveled from Whitehorse to Johannesburg, from Auckland to Helsinki. His next major experience was a hitch of two years "as an Army correspondent during the Korean brouhaha."

He is married to "an odd, pretty English girl" who has presented him with "three pretty odd children." The Emmett family lives in a large, comfortable old house southeast of Seattle, "with Mt. Rainier sitting outside our picture window."

Mr. Emmett ends his letter to your Editor by saying: "I've begun to write again because I was beginning to become unhappy with myself for not writing." Bravo, we say—and let nothing stop you!

BLOEHM'S WALL

by GEORGE EMMETT

As the first cocky notes from the Miramanda's horn rippled the still air, Bloehm felt himself emerging from the morning's torpor. Each Saturday the weekly packet from Puerto Mexico would bob into view on the horizon, tooting festively for the last half hour of her voyage toward the company dock. There, as the cheers and *bienvenidos* died away over the water, a score of eager brown hands would reach out for her lines and make her fast to the quay.

In the past the tub had had to wait for the evening tide, but now, with her new Diesel-powered boom, she could exchange her civilized cargo and occasional passenger for the island's copra and be cast off

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again in little over an hour, leaving the holiday of her arrival half empty in her wake. Progress. Bloehm approved, but his chest expelled a sigh.

He used the bedpan with difficulty, then propped himself up against the pillows. The Pacific sun, flooding past the opened shutters, warmed the bed. It was a splendid day—a day to be spent sipping beer on the veranda, with one's sight drifting across the flowers of Ingrid's garden to the kodachrome scene at the quay. If only he was well.

At least the pain was lower now. He thought of the pain as a wall and he measured his progress by its height. Sometimes the wall was very low, no higher than a grave. But when the wall was high, it could turn the siesta hour into night.

He heard the door open gently and sensed Ingrid's presence. "I'm awake," he said in German.

"I wasn't sure." She went over to the bed and smiled down at him, her hand on his forehead. "You must have had a good night. I didn't hear you."

"I slept," he said dully.

"The Miramanda is almost in. I ought to be at the dock for the unloading."

He looked up at his wife, trying to see her through the veil of habit. Ingrid's figure had sagged a little with the years and the handsome pile of blonde hair was surrendering to gray; but all in all she had stood up well to the loneliness and the heat. For the thousandth time since his illness he felt tempted to make her join him in his pain.

"Tell me the truth," he smiled. "Which is it you go down there to see—the unloading or the half-naked stallions who perform it?"

"I won't go if you prefer," she answered without anger. "But you've said yourself that these people will steal the kick from a burro if they're not watched."

He turned away from her, too weary with her patience to continue the game. "Go. Go and be damned."

She accepted her release docilely. "Do you want your injection before I go?"

Bloehm nodded. The wall of pain had begun to rise. While she readied the syringe he freed the knot from his pajama cord, pulled the cotton trousers down over his buttocks, and with some effort turned over in the bed. Then he closed his eyes against the needle's familiar sting.

After a moment Ingrid's lips touched his cheek. He heard her pick up the bedpan and go out. Soon his pain crumbled again into the dry, cool dust of sleep.

It was the sigh that he heard first, followed by the soft rustle of wicker as someone shifted in the chair across the room. Abruptly Bloehm was alert. It was as though in his sleep he had been caught up

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on a carousel of sensations and then thrown off, wide-awake now, at a station called fear.

Weiss. His memory coughed up the name like phlegm. It was Weiss who had moved in the chair. He sensed it as the circus trainer senses the poised cat at his back, as the blind person senses the chasm a step beyond the cane. The skin of his neck grew tight.

So. After all these years, Weiss had claimed him.

Discipline, Bloehm commanded himself; *discipline above all!* He remained perfectly still, his body turned to the wall, marshalling his thoughts. The drumming in his chest began to subside.

Ingrid had never known of that ancient affair. She would have let this fellow émigré of theirs into the house, suspecting nothing. *But please don't disturb him,* she would have cautioned; *poor Carl, sleep is his only pleasure these days.* Even now she was probably puttering in her kitchen below, pleased with the surprise she had prepared—an old business colleague to attend his awakening.

It was just as well. Today was as good as any to meet Emil Weiss again.

The room had acquired the granite silence of a tower. He waited, subduing the ache of fear with reason, arming himself with bricks from his wall. No, he would not show weakness to this beggar from another age. At last he turned over in the bed.

"There, Emil," he half whispered. "You see? I knew you would come to visit me one day."

Weiss, deprived of his advantage, struggled awkwardly out of the chair.

"No, don't get up." Bloehm grinned tentatively. "At our age one has earned the right to be comfortable."

But the visitor remained standing. His eyes, hobbled by thick lenses, evaded his host's. He appeared confused, like some elderly pensioner who had left his bus at the wrong stop and could not find his way home again.

"What is it, Emil?" Bloehm raised himself onto his elbows. "Don't tell me you've forgotten your lines. My God, you've had almost twenty years to rehearse!"

"I am trying to control myself, Carl." The once familiar voice now quaked with age and emotion.

Bloehm regarded him: a sad, shabby gnome of a man who had long ago ceased yielding to style. The shabby suit, the cheaply barbered fringe of hair, the soiled bit of tape which served to repair the broken eyeglass frame—these were the clues to what time had left of Emil. Bloehm felt a twinge of satisfaction.

"You look disreputable, old comrade—as though you haven't slept between clean sheets since . . ."

"Enough, Carl." Weiss drew his shoulders back in the ill-fitting

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suit. "Don't you care why I am here?"

"Of course." Bloehm fished his hand along the surface of the night table without finding what he was looking for. "To kill me, isn't it?"

He said it perfunctorily, still smiling, then leaned back against the pillows with his fingers laced complacently across his stomach. "I don't suppose you've got a decent cigarette with you? Ever since the bankruptcy of our firm I've had to smoke what the donkeys leave behind."

Weiss's shoulders slumped. He breathed a long melancholy sigh. "I admit, Carl—the times I lived this moment in my mind I made myself believe—that you would do me the favor—to be afraid, to cringe—if only a little."

"Me?" Bloehm spat with annoyance. "You should have known better."

He noticed his cigarettes then, lying under the night table, and leaned over the side of the bed to retrieve them. The wall rose abruptly, signaled by the exertion. Not very high this time, but still, it was difficult to keep his hand from shaking while he held the match. He wondered if Ingrid was waiting for him to call. He would need another injection soon.

"Yes, I should have known better," Weiss admitted forlornly. "The dream is never as imaginative as the reality."

"So. Finally. In your old age; a hint of cynicism." Bloehm's smile renewed itself. He directed it at his guest through an exhalation of smoke. "Did you bring a pistol, Emil? I know you—you are too gentle for the knife and too weak for the garrote."

Weiss's hand strayed automatically to the weight dragging at his trouser pocket.

Bloehm emitted a sharp cough of laughter. "Excellent. But do you know how to use it? I cannot imagine you were permitted lessons in your cell."

"They give other lessons behind the walls, Carl. Lessons in patience. Lessons in resolution."

"My dear God, such zeal!" Bloehm held his cigarette between thumb and forefinger and studied it with distaste. It was his visitor's returning calm, the calm of the fanatic poised on the brink of triumph, that disturbed him. If he was to secure any peace, any finality from this encounter, he would have to break that returning calm. Once he had manipulated Weiss with ease. He could do it again.

"Poor Emil, there must be more than the usual number of days to a prison year. Such cost for a moment like this!"

Weiss stiffened. "It cost enough. You saw to that."

"Ah, well, everything costs more these days—even revenge." He cast about absently for an ashtray. "Tell me: what made you decide I was worth your bullets?" He asked it

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carefully. The inflection was masterful.

Astonishment welled in Emil's face. "Do you deny it? Do you deny Elsa's murder even now?"

Gently, gently, Carl, you are reaching him.

"I deny nothing, I admit nothing. It is for you to show credentials."

"Yes, yes, of course." Irony was heavy in the agitated voice. "I remember you said that to the prosecutor at my trial when he trapped you in your lies."

"Where is your gratitude, Emil? I risked perjury to lie in your defense."

"Obvious lies! Clever lies! Lies you knew would be discovered; lies that convicted me of killing Elsa!"

Emil's voice had begun to rise to the bait. He was responding.

"Speculation," Bloehm snapped. "I insist on evidence!"

"Certainly, Carl. Knowing you, would I have come here without evidence? Evidence by all means!"

Emil wrested an envelope from inside his coat and tossed it into Bloehm's lap. "This was sent to me just before my release. There must be others, Carl—your wife, perhaps —who wish me Godspeed on this visit."

Meticulously Bloehm unfolded Elsa's yellowing letter and began to read. It was slow work without his glasses, but glasses were not appropriate to the moment. The letter began, *"My beloved Carl . . ."*

When he had finished, Bloehm put the letter aside and grinned. "Your credentials begin to take on authority. So. You know. But you cannot imagine what an appetite she had for me in those days, your Elsa. It was my iron she fed on, Emil, not your flowers and concern. When I took her, she knew she was a woman." He stubbed out his cigarette, elaborately. "What a pity you were never a man."

The visitor looked suddenly stricken. His voice dropped to a whisper. "Why did you kill her? If it was that way between you . . ."

Bloehm made himself more comfortable against the pillow. "A man like me makes firm decisions, Emil. What to take, how long to keep it, when to throw it away."

Weiss was staring at him incredulously. *Already the idiot's hand is reaching for the weight in his pocket.* "And there were other decisions to be made. Our annual audit was not far off, you remember, and I did not relish the prospect of your weeping when you realized what I had done with our capital reserves. Or of Elsa's when we were separated by a prison gate."

"Enough, Carl!"

Bloehm had chosen his words and blended his tone perfectly. They struck at Weiss like claws, churning his face into a nest of rage and disbelief. He was tugging now at the pistol; it seemed to have become stuck in his trouser lining.

Bloehm's smile tightened. *How*

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typical. In the hands of a fool like Emil, the moment of truth become a charade! He is at the brink. Another push, and—His voice droned on. "At least she died in your bed, Emil. A single blow to the neck."

"Swine!" The strangled oath, barely audible, seemed all that Weiss could free. Then suddenly the pistol was out, held in that palsied hand and pointed at Bloehm's head. It was a revolver, and Weiss had neglected to draw back the hammer. He lurched closer to the bed, trying dseperately with both hands to pull the trigger.

". . . and you went off to learn—what was it again? Patience and resolution." Bloehm heard his own voice babbling on like some gross recording played on an eccentric turntable. "While the firm of Bloehm & Weiss became Bloehm & Company. Of course business conditions—the scandal—"

He saw Weiss's thumb cock the hammer at last. Bloehm's vision blurred. He felt his courage draining rapidly, like water from a broken vase. He could not go on. He lay back with his head tight against the pillow, staring fascinatedly into the mouth of the pistol, waiting for it to speak the syllable which would free him for all time from guilt and fear and pain.

Instead, the gun barrel wavered. A sigh filled the room.

"Now!" Bloehm whispered. "Now, Emil, *now!*"

Weiss steadied himself slowly. The revolver arced down to his side. He took a deep breath and stepped back from the bed. "No, not again, Carl. You are not going to use me again."

So. The performance was over. Bloehm did not reply immediately. He used the bedsheet to dab weakly at the perspiration covering his face. The wall of pain was rising again. "You've come so far to kill me. Why do you hesitate?"

Weiss was regaining his composure. He shrugged. "On the boat there was talk of the foreigner who lies in this house, waiting for the octopus inside his body to finish him. They said that when the morphine wears off one can sometimes hear his screams over the noise of the harbor."

The sounds of the Miramanda, weighing anchor, drifted across the sill. Bloehm looked away.

"I can be patient, Carl. A week, a month, six months—time is not important any more. I've taken a room nearby where, when the wind is right, I will be able to hear the screams they speak of." He started to go.

"Emil, wait!" The wall was rising swiftly. Soon he would not be able to climb it. "The gun." He reached out, hating himself for the gesture. "At least, leave me the gun."

For the first time Weiss smiled. It was an almost perfect mimicry of his own. "You did not have to send

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me Elsa's letter, Carl. I would have come without it."

He tossed the revolver onto the bed at Bloehm's feet. "The bullets are at the bottom of the harbor. I was afraid you would force me to use them."

He stood there a moment, using up the smile, then he opened the door and went out.

So. It was he who had been the puppet, and Weiss the puppeteer. Emil had learned a thing or two.

The wall rose to the sky, extinguishing the sun. He heard Emil's footsteps receding slowly down the stairs.

It is dark, darker than it has ever been, but I must not cry out. From now on he will be waiting, a critic without pity, listening for the music of my pain to begin. Whatever else happens, I will deny him that.

It was only when Ingrid hurried into the room, her face pale and the morphine needle trembling in her hand, that he realized he had been screaming all the while.

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Only a few times in the 24-year history of EQMM have we published two stories by the same author in the same issue. And now we are doing it again.

Before we could get George Emmett's "first story" ("Bloehm's Wall") into print, we received his second story; and that second story is so different from his first, and so equally fine—indeed, in some ways, it is a richer tale, and certainly as compelling—that we decided to give you Mr. Emmett's first two efforts back to back.

Mr. Emmett is one of the most promising new talents we have published in a long time. He has style and substance; he has, for a newcomer, a remarkable grasp of characterization—didn't you feel it in "Bloehm's Wall"?

We are hoping that by the time you read Mr. Emmett's first two stories his third will be in EQMM's inventory—with more to come . . .

A FINE WINTER THIRST

by GEORGE EMMETT

IT TAKES HARDLY NO TIME AT ALL for fresh meat to spoil, for summer to end and the snow to come, for a good grift to turn bad. A couple of hours ago I'd been sorry to have dug in here, but not any more. Not tonight. When a man can put up with his own smell, he's ready to go to bed with the world.

The bo's call me Dummie, saving on the price between dumb and mute. A bo will save where he can; but there's a skullful of notions stored up here that I've traced out of books the Devil himself had to write, and the nuns never meant me to read. And all old Nick could think of to keep his secrets safe was to short out my tongue somewhere along the circuit from my brain . . .

The last bottle of harvest wages from Imperial had run dry and I was sober when the N.P. tracks rolled me into the King Street freight yard. Sober, but late. Already the salmon fleet was funneling west through the Straits of Juan de Fuca, and they weren't about to pump 180 degrees of rudder just because Dummie needed wages.

Anyhow, the slow have it coming to them; that's one of Nick's secrets. I'd spent the autumn around Seattle before, and it's not any worse than other places if you settle for the low end of the hog and

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have a taste for the seadrift out of the Aleutians.

Down in the Kent Valley, for as long as the season lasts, pickers are worth four bits a flat, with a two-way ride thrown in. And nobody gets sheisted out of wages, like can happen in Santa Clara and Joaquin.

No, you can't knock the autumn up here if you don't mind a lick of work, union scale or no.

It's the winter that tries to push you around.

If it hadn't been for the Swede, I might have trickled south again ahead of December. But to a man with a wooden tongue, a woman who won't call him dummy, even when she's juiced, is more of a prize than a warm coat of weather.

Gussie the Swede was a Puget gal, redwood-built from hips to neck, only topped off just above the five foot level. She was the only banty Swede I ever laid eyes on.

I'd remembered her square blonde face from other years around Vincent de Paul's, but it was working the strawberry beds out of Puyallup that we met for good.

We'd both been short of prospering—there was no mistaking that—so we nodded "How do."

It was still early, with The Mountain just catching fire from the sun. We worked back to back, slow at first, getting the stiffness out and teaching our fingers how to pick by themselves. Then faster as we warmed to it, pushing the flats ahead down the black loam rows, filling the boxes in the flats and breakfasting off the big ones.

The Swede straightened up as she finished her first flat.

"Going to be hot one today, you yust bet," she said in that questioning, pink-colored voice of hers.

I nodded, still picking. She had the advantage, not having to bend so far to reach the low beds, but she'd been holding back for me. The rows always seem shorter alongside one of your own kind.

The sun was kite-high overhead before she eased up again, wiping the sweat onto her freckled arm and paying notice again that I was there.

"By Yesus, you one hell of a sociable fellow, ain't you?" she sang, frowning.

I shrugged and made my sound so she'd understand.

The Swede's face opened and shut on the discovery. "Mute? Is dot what's wrong wid you?"

I nodded, glad she hadn't used "dumb."

"Well, what a fool you make me be!" She laughed, the joke on herself, and unballed her fists from her hips. "You know, you quiet enough fellow to get knocked teakettle over yuniper bush for no good reason at all."

My grin let her know it had already happened. More than once, sister, more times than I ever try to remember.

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"What do dey call you, den?" she asked, coming nearer.

I found a piece of twig and squatted to print in the soft loam: DUMMIE.

She squinted down at it for a moment, then rubbed it out with her toe. "Dot's no good for a man so tall and sad like you. I give you good name. Scandi*hoovian* name."

She thought. Then, "Dag. You like it?"

I made a sign that it didn't matter.

"Dagmar is my name, but I give Dag part to you. It's no use to me anyhow; everybody knows me by Gussie."

She clapped my shoulder like a man, then remembered to touch the yellow rings of hair at her neck like a girl. "By golly, we going to pick yust a couple more flats, den we going find some place to wet Dag's head!"

Oh, times were fair after I met the Swede. She carried herself Viking proud whether she'd had a few or not; and reminded me I'd once known how to laugh.

Of course, it wasn't all one way. Gussie could have tipped over the world without finding a lover as loving or a listener as natural born as me.

While the season lasted we picked the earth—beans, berries, and orchards from Everett to the Hood Canal. Nights we found beds that no farmer ever planted.

Then October ran out. The orchards were clean and the straw plowed under on the truck farms. I made California signs to Gus, but Gus was a Puget woman, remember, and a stubborn Swede besides. It would have been all right, too. A pair like Gussie and me can always ride out a winter tide just lashed to each other's thighs. If it hadn't been for the pint that came out of Marble's place—that and Irish Mae . . .

You couldn't put the blame to old Mae. She was Gussie's friend and all she'd meant was her best. It was Marble I'll never figure out.

Around Vincent de Paul's they said he was on the run from the east, but nobody knew for sure. If you'd thought it neighborly to ask Marble himself where he'd come from and why, he'd have told you Lapland on account of the cold, his squinty eyes narrowing down into matchheads so you'd get the point never to ask again. The bo's pegged him Marble the Egyptian on account of his olive skin and oily black hair.

His place wasn't much different from others along Yesler Way—twelve feet of frontage, with the lower half of the window painted black and a neon beer sign collecting flies above. Inside, you'd find hardboard walls with metal seams and a scuffed linoleum floor that tells you plain he doesn't mix any fancy drinks. Behind a curtain at the far end of the bar is Marble's room.

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Nobody ever saw a woman go in there. Or out. Nor a man, for that matter.

A dime-store print of the Madonna leans against the mirror behind the cash drawer, its frame stuffed with faded business cards. Nobody thought that was enough evidence to accuse him of owning a religion.

"That heathen wouldn't pour a shot to quench a thirst at a hanging," Irish Mae had crowed, drumming up a laugh, "till he'd wrung two bits out of the hangman and a deposit on the glass."

And it was true about Marble spiking a few fingers of whiskey with rat bait every night, and planting it among the empties in his alley for the winos to find.

Although to give Marble his due, he closed his place on Christmas Day and didn't open it again until New Year's Eve.

I wouldn't have gone, even that first time, if Gussie hadn't pushed me into it. The bo's gathered at Marble's to save a penny on beer and a nickel on his shot prices. Grift is scarce and chicken feed counts when the harvest season's done.

Between chores Marble kept to a stool behind the bar, his belly resting comfortable in his lap, one eye on the trade, the other on the door.

As soon as we'd found a couple of places to stand, he slid off the stool and oozed up to us through the smoke.

"Long time no see, Gussie. I was beginnin' to think I lost a good cash customer." A mute grows an ear for voices; Marble sounded as though he'd used his to tunnel his way out of New York.

The Swede wasn't paying him any more attention than she had to. "Two wid water back," she ordered, laying her purse on the bar.

"Sure, sweetheart." Half playfully he began to open Gussie's purse.

She snatched it away from him. "Dot's enough, Marble. You get paid."

"I don't wanna get paid, I'll take it in trade," he crooned. "Who's the new boy friend?" His grin switched over to me.

"Dag," Gussie answered him, feeling in the purse for what was left of our roll. "He can't talk, so don't you make fun of him, you hear?"

"Make funna who?" He was still looking at me, measuring. "What's she mean you can't talk, Dag? The Swede got control of your buttons, or what?"

The toothless bo at my elbow snickered and I could feel the color creeping up on my neck.

"I told you he can't talk. Why don't you yust fix us drink now and leave us alone?" Gussie had spread a dollar bill on the bar and Marble's fingers moved over it like a hungry squid.

He set out two glasses and peeled the foil from a bottle of State Charter. "No offense, *amigo*," he said,

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winking along the bar. "You ain't no dummy, not as long as she's gettin' it up."

He finished pouring and leaned toward me, waving the dollar bill under my nose as though it had a smell. "It's not every guy that's got a broad like Gussie to get it up for him when he needs it."

Maybe it was just the whoop of rummy laughter. Or maybe it was the way I'd got to feeling about the Swede. I watched my hand reach out and pluck the money out of Marble's fingers while my other arm swept the shot glasses off the bar. Then I pulled Gus away and shoved her toward the door.

There was a short suck of air, then Marble grabbed up a leather-covered sap and came traveling around the bar, puffing oaths like a locomotive. His shirt front was dripping State Charter and his face had changed from olive to purple.

I stood there, trying not to blink, my hands at my sides, wondering what I was going to do when he reached me. It was a waste of wondering. He skidded to a hissing stop a few feet away, aiming the sap at the door. "Go on, beat it, botha yez! Get outa here before I call the cops!"

You could see that Marble wasn't used to anybody standing on the tracks after he'd raised a head of steam.

The rasping voice fanned us through the door. "Don't think you're off the hook, dummy! You owe me. Remember!"

Out on the street Gus was sore. "You crazy Dag, you get your head busted for sure one day." But she slipped her arm through mine as we walked away. It was something she'd never thought to do before.

The Swede got wind of a derelict barge beached on Lake Union. Its hold filled and emptied with the tide, the rain knew ways through the wheelhouse roof, and the night we moved in, rats got hysterical over our provisions. If at first it didn't seem like much of a flop against a northwest winter, it was because I hadn't reckoned on my Swede.

Somehow a mattress and a lantern turned up and the rats were piped ashore. There was a morning when Irish Mae trundled some asbestos paste aboard; by noon the roof was caulked. And soon the smell of coffee began to make a stand against rotting timber and the sharper airs from the lake.

Without grudging me mine, Gussie was tapering off. She'd found a day job, splaying fish on the pier. I kidded her, holding my nose and such, but it kept the money floating in. And it hurt. Don't ask me why. Maybe it's only a dummy that needs to pay his keep.

The grift I found wasn't much—sorting lumber in a yard—but it was wages. And bo's with good tongues in their mouths were

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scratching their backs against store fronts, catching the rain in their cupped palms. You should have seen Gussie smile.

Still, I never knew how much woman there was left in that *flicka* of mine until the December afternoon I came back to new curtains over the cabin windows and she told me she was pregnant.

After she said it she just sat there with her back up straight against the hard chair, her big fish-splaying hands folded loose in her lap and her blue Swede eyes looking up at me solemn to see how I was going to take it.

When it'd sunk in, I eased myself into the other chair and wrote, grinning, for her to read: *I thought you're too old.*

What I won't forget was how she threw herself onto me, hugging that Swede body fierce to mine, kissing me wild, and her voice, laughing and crying, "Oh, my Dag, my poor good Dag. I t'ought so too!"

Suddenly it seemed we might make it, Gussie and I, all the way into the Classes, with a kid growing up and all the rest of it. That kind of secret is easy kept by a dummy. Not by a woman though, especially when she's filling up with child.

It was Mae she told. I didn't find out until later.

For a rummy with her years running out, Mae was still good for a laugh and a chatter. Sometimes she had booze to sell. I bought it once and never again. Mae built her own, boiling corn mash in five-gallon paint cans, aging it until she felt parched. I remembered my Ma was Irish too, or so the nuns told me.

Meanwhile, the world kept unglueing itself from my feet. Where I'd put my back into my job before, I put even more into it now. I'd pick up a six-pack on payday instead of a fifth. The Seattle days were growing shorter, the weather colder, but if I noticed it at all, I know I didn't mind.

Christmas Eve the buying crowds were thick in town, and I had a stop of my own to make, so it was late when I got back to the barge.

There was a cop outside. His yellow oilskin cape glistened in the headlights from the road. The beam from his flashlight covered me coming down the short path.

"You live in there?" He ponied his head around at the barge.

I nodded, looking past him for a sign of the Swede. Nothing stirred in the wheelhouse—just black water lapping at the hull, and that black night-silence aboard.

Something began to crawl inside me.

"Then I'm going to have to cite you for a violation of City Trespass Ordinance Number—" He was young, and as formal as a cadet. He was still taking out his book when I swept past him and leaped aboard the barge.

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"Hold it! Where do you think you're going?"

On deck I kicked open the wheelhouse door. It was dark. The Swede wasn't there.

The cop had climbed after me. I turned into his light, making useless signs at the empty cabin and moaning the question I couldn't ask.

"All right now, buddy, calm down. Can't you talk?"

I shook my head.

"Okay then." He put his book away. "We took two women to the hospital from here this afternoon. It's lucky the older one had made it up to the road before she passed out. They were both turning blue."

I'd stopped listening. My hand shook, scribbling on the back of my pay stub while he held the flashlight: *Which hospital?*

"Saint Marian's."

He didn't try to stop me as I vaulted down to the gravel beach and up the path to the road. Traffic was still heavy along the lake, but I knew what my chances were of halting an empty cab on Christmas Eve. It was almost a mile around the lake to the hospital. I ran flat out against the surging headlights.

It was to Mae's ward they took me first. She was still weak, but her eyes were Irish-mad.

"Did Gussie tell you 'bout Marble's lark?" she whispered as soon as the nurse had gone.

I shook my head.

"Ah, it's just as well," she sighed. It's me that knows the most of it."

She waited until I'd sat down before she went on. "It's part my fault, Dag, I won't try to get away from that. 'Twas me that let it slip about Gus being in the family way. If I'd been but half sober—well, you know my ways.

"Marble laughed when I told him. 'You don't say,' he says. 'Maybe I ought to send a little mother's milk to celebrate on.'

"I couldn't think fer blessin' what'd got into him when he truly comes up with a pint. There wasn't much that was clear—I'd been puttin' away breakfast at Marble's place for an hour by then—but I remember Marble says when I reached fer it, 'Wait a minute, Mae. I can't send out a pint only three-quarters full.'

"So he goes behind the curtain—there's no one but me at the bar—and when he comes out, the pint is topped off full and the cap screwed on.

"Ah, that Marble. He'll find himself sizzlin' in hell some day, and nothin' to soothe his thirst but a canteen full of salt." She closed her rheumy eyes to see it.

"But you know what I said to him?" The gray hair rocked sadly against the pillow. " 'Marble,' I says, 'it could be that yer finally growin' the heart to match yer belly.'

"He was grinnin' that Egypt grin of his, and if only my head'd been clear, I'd've remembered the kind of lark Marble likes to play."

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Mae stopped whispering long enough to stir up the phlegm in her throat. "The rest was purely mine, Dag. If I'd just poured Marble's pint straight, we'd both have spit it out and no harm done. Only I thought I'd spend a bit for eggs and cream and such and do the pint up proper for Christmas.

"It tasted somethin' fine, not bitter at all. Thank God yer woman let me drink the most of it!"

I shrugged off an urge to laugh and squeeze her hag throat at the same time.

As the nurse came back into the ward, Mae's whisper turned scared. "Tell Gussie not to let on, Dag. When they asked me, I told 'em I found the pint. If I'd said Marble and he denied it, they'd think I was lyin'." She clutched at my hand. "They'd believe that tax-payin' Egyptian before they'll take truth from me! She'll make it, Dag—she's got a heart, that one!"

I figured Mae would need a drink when they let her out. I dug the wedding ring out of my pocket, still wrapped in ribbon and foil, and slipped the box under her pillow.

Then I went down to the morgue to say goodbye to the Swede.

Crossing the bridge at the north end of the lake, I swung south along the road I'd come. There wasn't anything to hurry for this time. I walked along slow, my mackinaw open to the night mist, my hands dug warm inside the pockets. It was almost an hour before I reached the barge.

The wheelhouse was dark and the barge rocked a little with the ebbing tide. From the road, looking down, no one'd ever know that Gussie and me had been building something inside. I thought of the curtains in the windows; Gus had bought them new. But what good to a man are a set of rose-colored curtains?

It was close to midnight and the mist had changed to snow when I found myself alone with Yesler Way. Even the bo's were gone, scattered off to the missions for a slice of temperance turkey and flop for the night.

The bars were gated across the front. There was a week's pay in my pocket and no place open to buy a drink; old Nick was having his laugh.

A patrol car clanked past on chains, its tail-lights staring back at me through the snow.

I stopped in front of Marble's long enough to read the sign in the door: *Closed. No Deliveries Until Dec. 31.*

The alley, when I found it, was deep in its own kind of night. At least the cops couldn't bag me there for their quota of stiffs. The snow wasn't slanting in, and I might've found half a stubby or two lying around.

Rats thudded away as I sifted through bins from the taverns. It made me think of Marble, and I

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wondered if he'd baited a treat for the winos on Christmas Eve too.

A couple of matches helped me find out. There was a bottle, ounces full, planted careful on top of Marble's empties. I shook it up, pulled the cork, and licked some onto my tongue. Then I smashed the bottle against the bricks.

It was after the sound of glass had tinkled out that I heard Marble's "Haw!" and the click of a lock. A shaft of light fell past me across the alley, and suddenly the Egypt face was only inches away, leering blind through the crack in the door.

"Whatsa matter out there?" he called into the dark. "Taste somethin' you didn't like?"

Pressing against the wall, I could feel the frost from his breath brush my chin. There was an automatic in his hand. And the neck of the bottle I'd smashed against the brick was in mine.

They'll be winter harvesting down Imperial way pretty soon, but there's time before I drift. Meanwhile it's warm here, in the back of Marble's place, with an electric fire going, the door locked from the inside, and booze by the case piled high against one of the walls.

The Swede would've been disappointed, her man sitting on the floor like this, a fifth between his knees, fattening up a fine winter thirst out of Marble's pretzel bowl. Only she's dead, of course—her and the baby and somebody she used to call Dag. Still, she'd be glad if she knew that I won't be alone for Christmas.

Marble, cold now and beginning to stiffen, watches me from across the room, his eyes half lidded, his back propped up against the wall where I've put him. He's awful quiet; but what would you expect a dead man to say?

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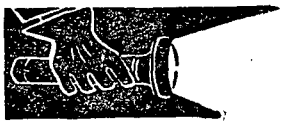

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The fifth volume of those August Derleth stories which hover so happily between parody and straightforward replica of the Sherlock Holmes canon is, fittingly, THE CASEBOOK OF SOLAR PONS (Mycroft & Moran, Sauk City, Wis., $5), with 12 tales. A Pons novelet, more openly parodistic (and not only of Holmes), is separately published as THE ADVENTURE OF THE ORIENT EXPRESS (Candlelight Press, 115 E. 86th St., N. Y. 10028, $3). Baker Street enthusiasts should also look into WEST BY ONE AND BY ONE, a collection of 22 essays, stories and miscellany by such California Irregulars as Poul Anderson and Fritz Leiber ($5; order from Dean Dickensheet, 1433 8th Ave., San Francisco).

★★★★ **MAIGRET CINQ, *by Georges Simenon*** (Harcourt, Brace & World, $5.95)

Five novels about Maigret, two of them new to America, including the delightful account of MAIGRET'S FIRST CASE in 1913.

★★★★ **THE JEALOUS ONE, *by Celia Fremlin*** (Lippincott, $3.50)

Powerful and skilfully plotted novel of domestic suspense, brightened by acute comic penetration into the private wars women wage.

★★★★ **BONY AND THE BLACK VIRGIN, *by Arthur Upfield*** (Collier 02596, 95¢)

One of the late master's strongest and most imaginative stories. First U.S. publication—as is THE LURE OF THE BUSH (Crime Club, $3.95), Bony's uneven but often rewarding first case (1928).

★★★ **THE MAN WHO SOLD DEATH, *by James Munro*** (Knopf, $4.95)

Professional gunrunner turns professional assassin for British secret service; tight, hard, cynical thriller in the le Carré vein.

★★★ **LANDRU, *by René Masson, translated (from* LES ROSES DE GAMBAIS*) by Gillian Tindall*** (Doubleday, $5.95)

Fictionalized life of possibly the greatest of mass-murderers, faithful to fact and stimulating in interpretation.

And allow me shamelessly to commend my own BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR: 20TH ANNUAL COLLECTION (Dutton, $3.95)—16 stories from the magazine year 1964, including 6 from EQMM and one by EQ.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JAIME SANDAVAL**

TITLE: ***All the Way Home***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Lake Superior, United States

TIME: Long ago . . .

COMMENTS: *A moving and nostalgic remembrance of what happened that terrible night at the old lighthouse on Wild Swan Point . . . by an author new to EQMM from whom we expect more remembrances of things past.*

THE HIRED MAN DROVE ME BACK to the farm from the cemetery. Becky's funeral had taken a lot out of me, although at my age I should be used to them. I came back from my father's funeral in a horse and buggy, from my mother's in an old tin lizzie, and from Becky's in a many-horsed thunderbolt. I've lived too long.

My father's farm—my farm—is on a spit of land jutting out into Lake Superior. It's a good farm. With a little help from the cows, it has taken care of us through the long years. But now there's no one I can even leave it to—I'm the last of the Harwoods.

What really hurts is knowing how Becky must have wondered—all the years after my mother died—why I never asked her to marry me. She never let on, of course, and there was nothing I could say, or do. Not since that terrible night on Wild Swan Point so many years ago . . .

There used to be an old, abandoned wooden lighthouse at the end of the causeway leading out to the point. It hasn't been there for a long time, but at sunset when the west wind blows and the clouds are dark on the lake, I can sit by the window and look down the road, and once again a light seems to shine from a window high up in the old lighthouse.

When I was twelve years old the light shone because my father had fixed up a room in the lighthouse for Miss Abby Hunter, up near the top where she wanted to be. My

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mother didn't like it when Miss Abby came back to live in our neighborhood again. Before she'd left, Miss Abby had taught school and lived on the Brainard farm about a mile from us. I once heard my mother say that some people were no better than they should be. My father heard her say it, too, and it made him angry. He told my mother she was a fool to believe all the gossip she heard.

We were at the supper table in the big farm kitchen, and there were rusks and wild strawberry jam. I wanted another rusk, but when I looked up and saw my father's face after he'd spoken, I was afraid to ask for it. My father was a big, strong, solid-looking man, with red cheeks and pale blue eyes and a quick temper that scared me sometimes. But he never scared my mother. She spoke right up to him, especially after Miss Abby came to live at the lighthouse.

I liked Miss Abby. She lent me books, but after my mother found out I had to hide them. Miss Abby always looked dressed up, with a ribbon in her blonde hair. She was small, and quick-moving, and pretty. When she was teaching, she never seemed much older than the bigger kids in school.

The lighthouse was a strange place to want to live in. It was old, so old it hadn't been used as a lighthouse for many years. There wasn't anything in the cobwebbed space at the bottom but a lot of bad-smelling oil drums. I never saw the room my father fixed up for Miss Abby at the top of the spiraling wooden staircase. She never invited me to see it, and I didn't know how to ask.

I came back to the farm one morning after collecting the eggs and taking the cows down to the pasture by the lake where we had a dock and where my father's sailboat was tied up during the summer. The dock was near the barn and the road, too, so I hadn't far to go. In the spring and fall my father used to go out with his nets and catch lake trout, perch, and pike.

He met me at our gate, saying he wanted to talk to me. As soon as I saw he wasn't angry any more, it made me feel important. "Tommy," he said, "twice a week I want you to carry a pail of milk down to Miss Abby at the lighthouse. You can milk Daisy after supper and get down and back before dark. Make it Sunday and Wednesday nights. And let's keep it a secret—just between the two of us." He put his finger to his lips and winked.

It sounded fine to me. I had no brothers or sisters, and I got so lonesome sometimes I welcomed the chance to talk to anyone. My mother was always busy in the kitchen after supper, and I knew she wouldn't miss me. Mom was a tall, stout woman with black hair and snapping black eyes. She was almost pretty when she smiled, but she hardly ever smiled after Miss Abby

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came to live at the lighthouse. I heard my father tell her once she'd better learn to control her tongue. My mother got red in the face. Her eyes glared, and she left the room.

I could hardly wait to milk Daisy the first night and be on my way down to Wild Swan Point. For the milk-carrying my father got me a special pail with a tight lid. It didn't spill even when I ran. When I reached the point, the sun was going down behind the lighthouse, and Miss Abby was sitting outside. She looked like a doll in her fluffy dress against the dirty wooden wall of the lighthouse.

She greeted me warmly and asked me to sit down while she put the milk away. I could see she was making a woodpile inside the big door. There was lots of driftwood around, and I carried some inside and stacked it. When Miss Abby came down, she thanked me. It was dark when I reached home, and I turned and looked back down the road and saw the high-up lighted window, like a small and lonely star against the night.

One Sunday afternoon in August the Brainards stopped by. They had a boy a year older than me. His name was Nate, and I didn't like him. He was bigger than me, and he was always picking a fight. Mrs. Brainard began saying how queer it was for Miss Abby to come back and live in the old lighthouse, and Nate sat grinning in his chair across the room from me. Finally he motioned with his head, and we went outside.

He headed for the outhouse. Ours was the best one in the neighborhood. It was painted green, and had a kind of small porch with mosquito netting all around, and a wild cucumber vine grew across the top. Nate stayed a long time, and when he came out he had a piece of chalk in his hand.

"What you been doing with the chalk?" I asked him.

"Go on in and see," he said.

I went in. One look was enough. All down one wall he'd written my father's name and Miss Abby's, and other things. He was all doubled up laughing when I charged out the door. I got him down, and we rolled on the ground, hitting and scratching and biting.

All of a sudden I was swung up off Nate into the air. "Can't you damn kids get along?" my father hollered in my ear. Nate sat up, looking scared. He glanced at the open outhouse door, and then away. My father looked at him, set me down, and went inside. Nate jumped up and streaked for the gate. My father burst out in time to see him vault the fence into the road.

"I'll make his tail smoke when I get my hands on him," he said. His lips were a thin hard line. He turned to me, and I stopped rubbing the eye that had got in the way of Nate's elbow. "Sorry, Tommy. Now run get me something to—"

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He broke off as my mother turned the corner and walked up to us.

Nobody said a word. My mother stared at each of us in turn. Two red spots blazed on her pale cheeks. My father was still standing in the open door. My mother went to push by him. He half raised an arm to stop her, then lowered it. She went inside.

I got out of there. I knew they'd say terrible things to each other. I went in the back door to the kitchen, and in the small mirror over the sink tried to see if my eye looked as bad as it felt. It was getting dark outside, and I was late with the chores. I went out to the barn and started on the cows. After a while my father came in and sat down on a stool and went to work without saying a word, his face grim in the lantern light.

I filled the special pail for Miss Abby and left the barn. I walked down the path to the road-gate, and I had just reached for the latch when my mother spoke to me from the darkness to one side. "Where are you going?" she asked me. I nearly dropped the pail. She didn't wait for me to answer. She took the pail from me, and without a word walked back with it to the barn.

I didn't know what to do. They didn't come out. I went back to the kitchen and waited for what seemed like a long time. I was hungry, but I didn't want to be the only one eating. My mother came in, finally. She didn't speak. She walked as though her eyes weren't seeing. She went right through the kitchen and on upstairs. Outside I could hear my father washing up at the pump, and then he walked down the path.

I remembered the writing on the outhouse wall, and I wet a rag at the pump and went down to the barn for the lantern. The first step I took inside I saw the gaping stall in the line of placidly chewing cows. Daisy's stall was empty. Daisy was gone, and my father was gone, too. My stomach felt cold.

I went back to the silent kitchen after finishing up out back. I lighted the lamp and put it on the table by the window. I must have fallen asleep with my head beside the lamp, because the parlor clock struck ten and woke me up. There wasn't a sound in the whole house.

I went upstairs to bed, but I couldn't fall sleep again. I thought about my mother and my father, and the way it used to be before Miss Abby came back. I wondered what would happen now, when my mother found out that Daisy was gone.

I didn't want to come downstairs in the morning at all. The big bedroom door was open when I passed it, and I felt better. Maybe everything would be all right. Downstairs my mother was at the stove and my father was at the table, eating, but they didn't say anything, even to me, and it wasn't all right.

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I stayed away from the house all morning. In the afternoon I went down to the corn crib and got out *Tom Sawyer* that Miss Abby had lent me. I kept it hidden there so my mother wouldn't know. I went down the path to read under the big elm beside the road. The sun was shining, but clouds were forming in the west and it was getting cooler.

I'd reached Chapter Five and almost forgotten where I was when someone said hello. I looked up and saw Joe Macy, the Rural Free Delivery mailman from Indian Bay. He was standing by our box at the gate with a letter in his hand. "Give this to your pa," he said to me. "He'll be glad of the chance to take it to the point."

I knew what it was even before I got up and took it from him. It was addressed to Miss Abby. Joe Macy grinned at me, a snaggle-toothed grim. "Me, I aim to get on home before it storms," he said.

I stood there wishing I was bigger. I'd have taken the grin right off his ugly face. Over in the west the cloudbanks were larger, and it was beginning to blow.

I wanted to hide the letter, but I was afraid to. I put *Tom Sawyer* back in the corn crib, and took the letter to the kitchen. My mother was working the churn and my father was oiling a trap. They had their backs to each other. My father put down the trap as if glad to have something else to do and took the letter from me. He turned it over and over in his big hands.

"Where'd this come from?" he asked me in a queer voice.

"Joe brought it to the gate just now," I said. "He said you could take it to Miss Abby so he'd get home before the storm."

"No!" my mother screamed. It was so close I ducked. I hadn't heard her come up behind me. "No, no! You're not going down there! Are you trying to drive me out of my mind, Tom?"

"Don't tell me in my own house what I'm not going to do, woman!" he shouted at her. He looked at me, and shoved the letter in his pocket. "It will keep," he said in a calmer tone. "I've got to go out and get in the nets before the storm tears them up."

He left the house. My mother sank down in a chair and began to moan and rock herself from side to side. I don't think she knew I was still there. I couldn't stand it. I went outside, too. It was almost dark, and blowing hard—much too hard for my father to be heading out in the boat to pull in his nets.

I started to run for the dock, but when I turned the corner of the barn I stopped. I could see the dock from there, and silhouetted against the lake and the low-flying clouds I could see the boat's stubby mast. My father hadn't gone out on the lake. I knew where he'd gone.

In another five minutes it was so dark I couldn't even see the dock,

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let alone the boat. I went into the barn to get out of the wind. Daisy's empty stall reminded me of things all over again. Through a crack in the door left by a broken hinge I could look down the road and see the light high up in the lighthouse on Wild Swan Point.

I couldn't stay in the barn. I couldn't go back to the house. Out on the path the wind tore at me. I reached the road and started to run. Down the causeway I could hear big waves breaking against the rocky shore. I got to the lighthouse and sat down on the bench outside the big door to catch my breath. I began to be chilled in the wind, and I went to the door to go inside.

In the dark I couldn't find the latch at first, but when I did the door opened easily and didn't creak or groan as it had when I was delivering the milk. Someone had oiled the hinges. It was quiet inside, away from the soughing of the wind and the crashing of the waves. It was pitch-black, except for a single crack of light up at the top of the spiral staircase.

I felt around, looking for something to sit on. I almost yelled out loud when I bumped into something big and warm. It took me a second to realize it was Daisy, tethered inside out of the storm. She butted me with her head the way she always did when she wanted to be milked. I was afraid she would moo, so I got away from her.

I ran into the railing at the foot of the stairs, and I looked up again to the crack of light at the top. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to climb those stairs, one hand on the railing, the other on the wall. When I stood at the top outside the door, I could hear Miss Abby's voice. That high up I could hear the wind again, but I could hear her, too.

"—got to stop arguing with me, Tom," she was saying. "You saw the letter. They can't keep the child any longer. I've got to go and get her and bring her back here with me."

"No!" my father said sharply. "It's—it's no place for a child, Abby. We'll think of something. Give me a few days."

"The letter said right now, Tom. I'm going tomorrow. You can think of something when I'm back."

"Good God, Abby, do you realize what you're doing to me?" My father's voice sounded as it did the time he hit his hand with the maul. "It's impossible, I tell you! I can't —"

"You can and you will. I've been patient long enough. Look at me, Tom. Are you going to say you can't find a way? That I should go and not come back?"

"No!"

Miss Abby's silvery laugh broke the silence that set in after my father's hoarse exclamation. She murmured something I couldn't make out, and then neither of them spoke again. The light under the edge of

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the door went out suddenly. I crept back down the winding stairs in the darkness and let myself out the big door at the bottom. All I could think of was what was going to become of us.

Outside it was lighter. The moon showed fitfully through the racing clouds. The wind was higher than ever, and the waves smashed solidly on the rocks. I started back to the house. I was too cold and too tired to stand around.

Two-thirds of the way back over the causeway, I heard dislodged pebbles on the path ahead of me. Without even thinking, I plunged down into the rocks, and hid. Above me a cloaked shadow passed by, on the way to the lighthouse. I knew it was my mother even before the moon came out again for a second and showed me plainly. She was bent forward against the wind, talking to herself. When she passed, I got up out of the rocks and ran all the way home.

When I got there, I couldn't go inside. I couldn't stop thinking of my mother and father and Miss Abby at the lighthouse, and the dreadful things they'd say to each other. Nothing would ever be the same for any of us again.

I struggled against the wind down to the barn. I knew the animal heat of the cows always kept it warm. I took down a pitchfork and piled fresh hay into a corner of Daisy's empty stall. I must have gone to sleep there, because it seemed like a long time later that I heard a bell ringing. At first I thought it was in a dream, and then it got louder and louder.

I jumped up and ran to the barn door. The floor shook from the thunder of horses' hooves as the four-horse team from Indian Bay skittered down the road with the old fire pumper. Its iron bell was clanging steadily.

I whirled to look at the house. It was safely dark. I turned to look toward the point, but I think I knew before I looked. I could hear it before I could see it: the whole lighthouse was ablaze—great roaring sheets of flame were blowing out from the top hundreds of feet over the lake.

I just stood there. My mother had intended to kill Miss Abby, but without knowing it she had killed my father, too. She thought he was out in the boat. What would she do to herself when she found out he wasn't?

I ran down to the dock. Flat on my stomach on the rough planking, I clawed at the hard knots in my father's snubbing rope at the other end of which the boat pitched violently in the black choppy water. My fingernails were broken when I finally got it untied. I had a knife in my pocket, but I couldn't leave a cut rope end. The boat lurched away into the darkness of the lake, and I got up and ran back to the house. I was in bed when they came with the news about the lighthouse.

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No one but me ever knew what happened on Wild Swan Point that terrible night. The lighthouse burned flat, with a fire so fierce no one could get near it. The oil drums at the bottom burned for two days, and it was two more before they could sift the ashes. They found human bones mixed with Daisy's, not too many of either, and the human ones were buried as Miss Abby's. It never occurred to anybody that someone else could have been in the lighthouse.

On the third day a trawler found my father's boat a couple of miles out on the lake. They towed it into our dock. My mother had never left the dock the whole three days except for a couple of hours at a time. The lakemen told her gently that at the height of the storm my father must have been washed over the side.

When everything was done that had to be done, my mother hired a man to help with the farm. I did what I could, too. For a month my mother's eyes were sunk deep into her head. The only person she talked to was me, but nights I could hear her praying behind her closed bedroom door.

She didn't show any signs of getting better, and I didn't know what to do. She didn't eat hardly anything at all. I was sitting out on the front steps one afternoon when a man came down the road with a battered satchel in his hand, leading a little girl by the other hand. "Mrs. Harwood live here?" he called in from the gate.

I nodded. I couldn't have said anything. I was looking at the little girl. She was about three years old, with the bluest of eyes. There was no ribbon in her yellow hair.

They came up the path, and the man took off his hat and mopped his forehead. "Quite a way from Indian Bay," he said, and knocked on the door. I could feel my heart beating while I waited for my mother to answer the door. When she did, she looked out at the man inquiringly, but when she saw the little girl her features froze.

"Mrs. Harwood home?" the man asked.

"I'm Mrs. Harwood," my mother said.

"Oh." He looked taken aback. "Well, then, is the other Mrs. Harwood home?"

"I'm the only—" my mother began, and wrenched her gaze from the blue eyes and yellow hair. "Come along inside," she said curtly to the man. They went in and closed the door.

I patted the step beside me. "Come on and sit down here," I invited the little girl. "What's your name?"

"Becky." That was all she said. She sat down beside me with a tired sigh. Her little white shoes were all over road dust, and her thin features were pinched with weariness.

"I'm Tom," I told her. Even my

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mother had stopped calling me Tommy lately.

We sat in silence. I wasn't looking directly at her, but I heard her start to cry. She put her head down on her knees so that I shouldn't see her face. I didn't know what to do, so I put my arm around her.

My mother and the man were inside the house a long time. When they came out, the man had his hat on and was putting something in his pocket. He went down the path and up the road without saying another word. Twice he stopped to turn and look back at us, but my mother paid him no mind. "Come along, dear," she said to Becky, and held out her hand to her. "It's time to get the cows milked, Tom," she said to me in the same breath.

From the tone of her voice I knew everything was going to be all right.

And for fifteen years it was, until my mother died of cancer. She didn't have an easy time. It didn't seem as though she wanted one. She never set foot in a church after that night on Wild Swan Point, and she wouldn't let the minister in the house, but she made Becky and me go to Sunday school every week.

There were a lot of good years afterward, too, except that I had to sit and watch Becky patiently waiting for me to ask her to marry me. I sent her away to school, over her protests. She came back to the farm. My housekeeper complained for years about the waste of money on the unnecessary young hired men I insisted on having around the place. Becky never seemed to see them in any way that mattered.

There wasn't any answer I could find, then or ever.

Now Becky's gone too, and there's just me.

But it won't be for long.

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The Silent Grove, where the Idol House of Astarte stood, was a place of desolation and horror. No birds nested in its trees. It was filled with a sense of evil and menace, of the eerie and the uncanny . . . and it was here, in the shadowy moonlight, that the members of the house party witnessed an "impossible" murder . . .

THE "SUPERNATURAL" MURDER

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"AND NOW, DR. PENDER, WHAT ARE you going to tell us?"

The old clergyman smiled gently.

"My life has been passed in quiet places," he said.

"Very few eventful happenings have come my way. Yet once, when I was a young man, I had a very strange and tragic experience."

"Ah!" said Joyce Lemprière encouragingly.

"I have never forgotten it," continued the clergyman. "It made a profound impression on me at the time, and to this day by a slight effort of memory I can feel again the awe and horror of that terrible moment when I saw a man stricken to death by apparently no mortal agency."

"You make me feel quite creepy, Pender," complained Sir Henry.

"It made me feel creepy, as you call it," replied the clergyman. "Since then I have never laughed at the people who use the word atmosphere. There is such a thing. There are certain places imbued and saturated with good or evil influences which can make their power felt."

"That house, The Larches, is a very unhappy one," remarked Miss Marple. "Old Mr. Smithers lost all his money and had to leave it, then the Carslakes took it and Johnny Carslake fell downstairs and broke his leg and Mrs. Carslake had to go away to the south of France for her health, and now the Burdens have it and I hear that poor Mr. Burden has to have an operation almost immediately."

"There is, I think, rather too much superstition about such matters," said Mr. Petherick. "A lot of damage is done to property by foolish reports heedlessly circulated."

"I have known one or two 'ghosts' that have had a very robust personality," remarked Sir Henry with a chuckle.

"I think," said Raymond, "we

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should allow Dr. Pender to go on with his story."

Joyce got up and switched off the two lamps, leaving the room lit only by the flickering firelight.

"Atmosphere," she said. "Now we can get along."

Dr. Pender smiled at her, and leaning back in his chair and taking off his pince-nez, he began his story in a gentle reminiscent voice.

"I don't know whether any of you know Dartmoor at all. The place I am telling you about is situated on the borders of Dartmoor. It was a very charming property, though it had been on the market without finding a purchaser for several years. The location was perhaps a trifle bleak in winter, but the views were magnificent and there were certain curious and original features about the property itself.

"It was bought by a man called Haydon—Sir Richard Haydon. I had known him in his college days, and though I had lost sight of him for some years, the old ties of friendship still held, and I accepted with pleasure his invitation to go down to Silent Grove, as his new purchase was called.

"The house party was not a very large one. There was Richard Haydon himself, and his cousin, Elliot Haydon. There was a Lady Mannering with a pale, rather inconspicuous daughter called Violet. There was a Captain Rogers and his wife, hard-riding, weather-beaten people, who lived only for horses and hunting. There was also a young Dr. Symonds and there was Miss Diana Ashley.

"I knew something about Miss Ashley. Her picture was very often in the Society papers and she was one of the notorious beauties of the Season. Her appearance was indeed very striking. She was dark and tall, with a beautiful skin of an even tint of pale cream, and her half-closed dark eyes set slantways in her head gave her a curiously piquant and oriental appearance. She had, too, a wonderful speaking voice, deep-toned and bell-like.

"I saw at once that my friend Richard Haydon was very much attracted by her, and I guessed that the whole party was merely arranged as a setting for her. Of her own feelings I was not so sure. She was capricious in her favors. One day talking to Richard and excluding everyone else from her notice, and another day she would favor his cousin, Elliot, and appear hardly to notice that such a person as Richard existed; and then again she would bestow the most bewitching smiles on the quiet and retiring Dr. Symonds.

"On the morning after my arrival our host showed us all over the place. The house itself was unremarkable, a good solid house built of Devonshire granite—built to withstand time and exposure. It was unromantic but very comfort-

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able. From the windows of it one looked out over the panorama of the Moor, vast rolling hills crowned with weather-beaten Tors.

"On the slopes of the Tor nearest to us were various hut circles, relics of the bygone days of the late Stone Age. On another hill was a barrow which had recently been excavated, and in which certain bronze implements had been found. Haydon was by way of being interested in antiquarian matters and he talked to us with a great deal of energy and enthusiasm. This particular spot, he explained, was particularly rich in relics of the past.

"'But this place is the most interesting of all,' he said. 'You know its name—Silent Grove. Well, it is easy enough to see what it takes its name from.'"

"He pointed with his hand. That particular part of the country was bare enough—rocks, heather and bracken; but about a hundred yards from the house there was a densely planted grove of trees.

"'That is a relic of very early days,' said Haydon. 'The trees have died and been replanted, but on the whole it has been kept very much as it used to be—perhaps in the time of the Phoenician settlers. Come and look at it.'

"We all followed him. As we entered the grove of trees a curious oppression came over me. I think it was the silence. No birds seemed to nest in these trees. There was a feeling about it of desolation and horror. I saw Haydon looking at me with a curious smile.

"'Any feeling about this place, Pender?' he asked me. 'Antagonisims now? Or uneasiness?'

"'I don't like it,' I said quietly.

"'You are within your rights. This was a stronghold of one of the ancient enemies of your faith. This is the Grove of Astarte.'

"'Astarte?'

"'Astarte, or Ishtar, or Ashtoreth, or whatever you choose to call her. I prefer the Phoenician name of Astarte. There is, I believe, one known Grove of Astarte in this country—in the North on the Wall. I have no evidence, but I like to believe that we have a true and authentic Grove of Astarte here. Here, within this dense circle of trees, sacred rites were performed.'

"'Sacred rites,' murmured Diana Ashley. Her eyes had a dreamy far-away look. 'What were they, I wonder?'

"'Not very reputable by all accounts,' said Captain Rogers with a loud unmeaning laugh. 'Rather hot stuff, I imagine.'

"Haydon paid no attention to him.

"'In the center of the Grove there should be a Temple,' he said. 'I can't run to Temples, but I have indulged in a little fancy of my own.'

"We had at that moment stepped out into a little clearing in the center of the trees. In the middle of it

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was something not unlike a summerhouse made of stone. Diana Ashley looked inquiringly at Haydon.

"'I call it The Idol House,' he said. 'It is the Idol House of Astarte.'

"He led the way up to it. Inside, on a rude ebony pillar, there reposed a curious little image representing a woman with crescent horns, seated on a lion.

"'Astarte of the Phoenicians,' said Haydon, 'the Goddess of the Moon.'

"'The Goddess of the Moon,' cried Diana. 'Oh, do let us have a wild orgy tonight. Fancy dress. And we will come out here in the moonlight and celebrate the rites of Astarte.'

"I made a sudden movement and Elliot Haydon, Richard's cousin, turned quickly to me.

"'You don't like all this, do you, Padre?' he said.

"'No,' I said gravely. 'I don't.'

"He looked at me curiously. 'But it is only tomfoolery. Dick can't know that this really is a sacred grove. It is just a fancy of his; he likes to play with the idea. And anyway, if it were—'

"If it were?"

"'Well—' he laughed uncomfortably. 'You don't believe in that sort of thing, do you? You, a parson.'

"'I am not sure that as a parson I ought not to believe in it.'

"'But that sort of thing is all finished and done with.'

"'I am not so sure,' I said musingly. 'I only know this: I am not as a rule a sensitive man to atmosphere, but ever since I entered this grove of trees I have felt a curious impression and sense of evil and menace all around me.'

"He glanced uneasily over his shoulder.

"'Yes,' he said, 'it is—it is queer, somehow. I know what you mean but I suppose it is only our imagination makes us feel like that. What do you say, Symonds?'

"The doctor was silent a minute or two before he replied. Then he said quietly, 'I don't like it. I can't tell you why. But somehow or other, I don't like it.'

"At that moment Violet Mannering came across to me.

"'I hate this place,' she cried. 'I hate it. Do let's get out of it.'

"We moved away and the others followed us. Only Diana Ashley lingered. I turned my head and saw her standing in front of the idol house gazing earnestly at the image inside.

"The day was an unusually hot and beautiful one and Diana Ashley's suggestion of a Fancy Dress party that evening was received with general favor. The usual laughing and whispering and frenzied secret sewing took place and when we all made our appearance for dinner there were the usual outcries of merriment.

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"Rogers and his wife were Neolithic hut dwellers—explaining the sudden lack of hearth rugs. Richard Haydon called himself a Phoenician sailor, and his cousin was a Brigand Chief, Dr. Symonds was a chef, Lady Mannering was a hospital nurse, and her daughter was a Circassian slave. I myself was arrayed somewhat too warmly as a monk.

"Diana Ashley came down last and was somewhat of a disappointment to all of us, being wrapped in a shapeless black domino.

"'The Unknown,' she declared airily. 'That is what I am. Now for goodness' sake let's go in to dinner.'

"After dinner we went outside. It was a lovely night, warm and soft, and the moon was rising.

"We wandered about and chatted and the time passed quickly enough. It must have been an hour later when we realized that Diana Ashley was not with us.

"'Surely she has not gone to bed,' said Richard Haydon.

"Violet Mannering shook her head. 'Oh, no,' she said. 'I saw her going off in that direction about a quarter of an hour ago.' She pointed toward the grove of trees that showed black and shadowy in the moonlight.

"'I wonder what she is up to,' said Richard Haydon. 'Some devilment, I swear. Let's go and see.'

"We all trooped off together, curious as to what Miss Ashley had been up to. Yet I, for one, felt a curious reluctance to enter that dark foreboding belt of trees. Something stronger than myself seemed to be holding me back and urging me not to enter. I felt more definitely convinced than ever of the essential evilness of the spot.

"I think some of the others experienced the same sensations that I did, though they would have been loath to admit it. The trees were so closely planted that the moonlight could not penetrate. There were a dozen soft sounds all round us, whisperings and sighings. The feeling was eerie in the extreme, and by common consent we all kept close together.

"Suddenly we came out into the open clearing in the middle of the grove and stood rooted to the spot in amazement—for there, on the threshold of the Idol House, stood a shimmering figure wrapped tightly round in diaphanous gauze and with two crescent horns rising from the dark masses of her hair.

"'My God!' said Richard Haydon, and the sweat sprang out on his brow.

"But Violet Mannering was sharper. 'Why, it's Diana,' she exclaimed. 'What has she done to herself? Oh, she looks quite different somehow!'

"The figure in the doorway raised her hands. She took a step forward and chanted in a high sweet voice.

"'I am the Priestess of Astarte,'

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she crooned, 'Beware how you approach me, for I hold death in my hand.'

"'Don't do it, dear,' protested Lady Mannering. 'You give us the creeps, you really do.'

"Haydon sprang toward her.

"'My God, Diana!' he cried. 'You are wonderful.'

"My eyes were accustomed to the moonlight now and I could see more plainly. She did, indeed, as Violet had said, look quite different. Her face was more definitely oriental, and her eyes more of slits with something cruel in their gleam, and the strange smile on her lips was one that I had never seen there before.

"'Beware,' she cried warningly. 'Do not approach the Goddess. If anyone lays a hand on me it is death.'

"'You are wonderful, Diana,' cried Haydon, 'but do stop it. Somehow or other I—I don't like it.'

"He was moving toward her across the grass and she flung out a hand toward him.

"'Stop,' she cried. 'One step nearer and I will smite you with the magic of Astarte.'

"Richard Haydon laughed and quickened his pace, when all at once a curious thing happened. He hesitated for a moment, then seemed to stumble and fall headlong.

"He did not get up again, but lay where he had fallen prone on the ground.

"Suddenly Diana began to laugh hysterically. It was a strange and horrible sound breaking the silence of the glade.

"With an oath Elliot sprang forward. 'I can't stand this,' he cried. 'Get up, Dick, get up, man.'

"But still Richard Haydon lay where he had fallen. Elliot Haydon reached his side, knelt by him, and turned him gently over. He bent over him, peering in his face. Then he rose sharply to his feet and stood swaying a little.

"'Doctor,' he said. 'Doctor, for God's sake come. I—I think he is dead.'

"Symonds ran forward and Elliot rejoined us walking very slowly. He was looking down at his hands in a way I didn't understand.

"At that moment there was a wild scream from Diana.

"'I have killed him,' she cried. 'Oh, my God! I didn't mean to, but I have killed him.'

"And she fainted dead away, falling in a crumpled heap on the grass.

"There was a cry from Mrs. Rogers. 'Oh, do let us get away from this dreadful place,' she wailed. 'Anything might happen to us here. Oh, it's awful!'

"Elliot got hold of me by the shoulder. 'It can't be, man,' he murmured. 'I tell you it can't b[illegible]

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man cannot be killed like that. It is —it's against Nature.'

"I tried to soothe him. 'There is some explanation,' I said. 'Your cousin must have had some unsuspected weakness of the heart. The shock and excitement—'

"He interrupted me. 'You don't understand,' he said. He held up his hands for me to see and I noticed a red stain on them.

"'Dick didn't die of shock. He was stabbed—stabbed to the heart —and *there is no weapon.*'

"I stared at him incredulously. At that moment Symonds rose from his examination of the body and came toward us. He was pale and shaking all over.

"'Are we all mad?' he said. 'What is this place—that things like this can happen in it?'

"'Then it is true,' I said.

"He nodded. 'The wound is such as would be made by a long thin dagger, but—there is no dagger there.'

"We all looked at each other.

"'But it must be there,' cried Elliot Haydon. 'It must be on the ground somewhere. Let us look.'

"We peered about vainly. Violet Mannering said suddenly, 'Diana had something in her hand. A kind of dagger. I saw it glitter when she threatened him.'

"Elliot Haydon shook his head. 'He never even got within three yards of her,' he objected.

"Lady Mannering was bending over the prostrate girl on the ground. 'There is nothing in her hand now,' she announced, 'and I can't see anything on the ground. Are you sure you saw it, Violet? I didn't.'

"Dr. Symonds came over to the girl. 'We must get her to the house,' he said. 'Rogers, will you help?'

"Between us we carried the unconscious girl back to the house. Then we returned and fetched the body of Sir Richard."

Dr. Pender broke off apologetically and looked round. "One would know better nowadays," he said, "owing to the prevalence of detective fiction. Every street boy knows that a body must be left where it is found. But in these days we had not the same knowledge, and accordingly we carried the body of Richard Haydon back to his bedroom in the square granite house and the butler was despatched on a bicycle in search of the police—a ride of some twelve miles.

"It was then that Elliot Haydon drew me aside.

"'Look here,' he said. 'I am going back to the grove. That weapon has got to be found.'

"'If there was a weapon,' I said doubtfully.

"He seized my arm and shook it fiercely. 'You have got that superstitious stuff into your head. You think his death was supernatural; well, I am going back to the grove to find out.'

"I was curiously averse to his do-

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ing so. I did my utmost to dissuade him, but without result. The mere idea of that thick circle of trees was abhorrent to me and I felt a strong premonition of further disaster. But Elliot was entirely pigheaded. He was, I think, scared himself, but would not admit it. He went off fully determined to get to the bottom of the mystery.

"It was a dreadful night—none of us could sleep, or attempt to do so. The police, when they arrived, were frankly incredulous of the whole thing. They evinced a strong desire to cross-examine Miss Ashley, but there they had to reckon with Dr. Symonds, who opposed the idea vehemently. Miss Ashley had come out of her faint or trance and he had given her a strong sleeping draught. She was on no account to be disturbed until the following day.

"It was not until about seven o'clock in the morning that anyone thought about Elliot Haydon, and then Symonds suddenly asked where he was. I explained what Elliot had done and Symonds' grave face grew a shade graver. 'I wish he hadn't. It is—it is foolhardy,' he said.

"'You don't think any harm can have come to him?'

"'I hope not. I think, padre, that you and I had better go and see.'

"I knew he was right, but it took all the courage in my command to nerve myself for the task. We set out together and entered once more that ill-fated grove of trees. We called him twice and got no reply. In a minute or two we came into the clearing, which looked pale and ghostly in the early morning light.

"Then Symonds clutched my arm and I uttered a muttered exclamation. Last night when we had seen it in the moonlight there had been the body of a man lying face downward on the grass. Now in the early morning light the same sight met our eyes. Elliot Haydon was lying on the exact spot where his cousin had been.

"'My God' said Symonds. *'It has got him too!'*

"We ran together over the grass. Elliot Haydon was unconscious but breathing feebly and this time there was no doubt of what had caused the tragedy. A long thin bronze weapon remained in the wound.

"'Got him through the shoulder, not through the heart. That is lucky,' commented the doctor. 'On my soul, I don't know what to think. At any rate he is not dead and he will be able to tell us what happened.'

"But that was just what Elliot Haydon was not able to do. His description was vague in the extreme. He had hunted about vainly for the dagger and at last giving up the search had taken up a stand near the Idol House.

"It was then that he became increasingly certain that someone

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was watching him from the belt of trees. He fought against this impression but was not able to shake it off. He described a cold strange wind that began to blow. It seemed to come not from the trees but from the interior of the Idol House.

"He turned round, peering inside it. He saw the small figure of the Goddess and he felt he was under an optical delusion. The figure seemed to grow larger and larger. Then he suddenly received something that felt like a blow between his temples which sent him reeling back, and as he fell he was conscious of a sharp burning pain in his left shoulder.

"The dagger was identified this time as being the identical one which had been dug up in the barrow on the hill, and which had been bought by Richard Haydon. Where he had kept it, in the house or in the Idol House in the grove, none seemed to know.

"The police were of the opinion, and always will be, that he was deliberately stabbed by Miss Ashley, but in view of our combined evidence that she was never within three yards of him, they could not hope to support the charge against her. So the thing has been and remains a mystery."

There was a silence.

"There doesn't seem anything to say," said Joyce Lemprière at length. "It is all so horrible—and uncanny. Have you no explanation yourself, Dr. Pender?"

The old man nodded. "Yes," he said. "I have an explanation—a kind of explanation, that is. Rather a curious one—but to my mind it still leaves certain factors unaccounted for."

"I have been to seances," said Joyce, "and you may say what you like but very queer things can happen. I suppose one can explain it by some kind of hypnotism. The girl really turned herself into a Priestess of Astarte, and I suppose somehow or other she must have stabbed him. Perhaps she threw the dagger that Miss Mannering saw in her hand."

"Or it might have been a javelin of some kind," suggested Raymond West. "After all, moonlight is not very strong. She might have had a kind of spear in her hand and stabbed him at a distance, and then I suppose mass hypnotism comes into account. I mean, you were all prepared to see him stricken down by supernatural means and so you saw it that way."

"I have seen many wonderful things done with weapons and knives at music halls," said Sir Henry. "I suppose it is possible that a man could have been concealed in the belt of trees, and that from there he might have thrown a knife or a dagger with sufficient accuracy—agreeing, of course, that he was a professional. I admit that that sounds rather far-fetched, but it seems the only really feasible theory. You remember that the other

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man was distinctly under the impression that there was someone in the grove of trees watching him.

"As to Miss Mannering saying that Miss Ashley had a dagger in her hand and the others saying she hadn't, that doesn't surprise me. If you had all my experience you would know that five persons' accounts of the same thing will differ so widely as to be almost incredible."

Mr. Petherick coughed.

"But in all these theories we seem to be overlooking one essential fact," he remarked. *"What became of the weapon?* Miss Ashley could hardly get rid of a javelin standing as she was in the middle of an open space; and if a hidden murderer had thrown a dagger, then the dagger would still have been in the wound when the man was turned over. We must, I think, discard all far-fetched theories and confine ourselves to sober fact."

"And where does sober fact lead us?"

"Well, one thing seems quite clear. No one was near the man when he was stricken down, so the only person who *could* have stabbed him was himself. Suicide, in fact."

"But why on earth should he wish to commit suicide?" asked Raymond West.

The lawyer coughed again. "Ah, that is a question of theory once more," he said. "At the moment I am not concerned with theories. It seems to me, excluding the supernatural in which I do not for one moment believe, that that was the only way things could have happened. He stabbed himself, and as he fell, his arms flew out, wrenching the dagger from the wound and flinging it far into the zone of the trees. That is, I think, although somewhat unlikely, a possible happening."

"I don't like to say, I am sure," said Miss Marple. "It all perplexes me very much indeed. But curious things do happen. At Lady Sharpley's garden party last year the man who was arranging the clock golf tripped over one of the numbers—quite unconscious he was—and didn't come round for about five minutes."

"Yes, dear Aunt," said Raymond gently, "but he wasn't stabbed, was he?"

"Of course not, dear," said Miss Marple. "That is what I am telling you. There is only one way that poor Sir Richard could have been stabbed, but I do wish I knew what caused him to stumble in the first place. Of course, it might have been a tree root. He would be looking at the girl, of course, and in the moonlight one does trip over things."

"You say that there is only one way that Sir Richard could have been stabbed, Miss Marple," said the clergyman, looking at her curiously.

"It is very sad and I don't like to

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think of it. He was a right-handed man, was he not? I mean, to stab himself in the left shoulder he must have been. I was always so sorry for poor Jack Baynes in the War. He shot himself in the foot, you remember, after very severe fighting at Arras. He told me about it when I went to see him in the hospital, and very ashamed of it he was. I don't expect this poor man, Elliot Haydon, profited much by his wicked crime."

"Elliot Haydon," cried Raymond. "You think *he* did it?"

"I don't see how anyone else could have done it," said Miss Marple, opening her eyes in gentle surprise. "I mean if, as Mr. Petherick so wisely says, one looks at the facts and disregards all that atmosphere of heathen goddesses which I don't think is very nice. He went up to him first and turned him over, and of course to do that he would have to have had his back to them all, and being dressed as a Brigand Chief he would be sure to have a weapon of some kind in his belt. I remember dancing with a man dressed as a Brigand Chief when I was a young girl. He had five kinds of knives and daggers, and I can't tell you how awkward it was for his partner."

All eyes were turned toward Dr. Pender.

"I knew the truth," said he, "five years after that tragedy occurred. It came in the shape of a letter written to me by Elliot Haydon. He said in it that he fancied that I had always suspected him. He said it was a sudden temptation. He too loved Diana Ashley, but he was only a poor struggling barrister. With Richard out of the way and inheriting his title and estates, he saw a wonderful prospect opening up before him.

"The dagger had jerked out of his belt as he knelt down by his cousin, and almost before he had time to think, he drove it in and returned it to his belt again. He stabbed himself later in order to divert suspicion. He wrote to me on the eve of starting on an expedition to the South Pole in case, as he said, he should never come back. I do not think that he meant to come back, and I know that, as Miss Marple has said, his crime profited him nothing. 'For five years,' he wrote, 'I have lived in Hell. I hope, at least, that I may expiate my crime by dying honorably.'"

There was a pause.

"And he did die honorably," said Sir Henry. "You have changed the names in your story, Dr. Pender, but I think I recognize the man you mean."

"As I said," went on the old clergyman, "I do not think that explanation quite covers the facts. I still think there was an evil influence in that grove, an influence that directed Elliot Haydon's action. Even to this day I can never think without a shudder of The Idol House of Astarte."

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CALENDAR OF CRIME

The August story in the CALENDAR OF CRIME *series . . . a tale of Captain Kidd and a treasure he buried 260 years ago—a treasure of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, pearls, and pieces of eight. But it wasn't the buried treasure that became one of Ellery's most difficult problems in deduction; it was the peculiarly baffling murder . . .*

THE NEEDLE'S EYE

by ELLERY QUEEN

THIS BEING A TALE OF PIRATES and stolen treasure, it is a gratification to record that it all happened in that season of the year to which the moonstone and the poppy are traditionally dedicated. For the moonstone is a surprisingly moral object. To its lawful owner it brings nothing but good: held in the mouth at the full of the moon, it reveals the future; it heats the lover and it cools the heated; it cures epilepsy; it fructifies trees; and so on.

But rue and blight upon him who lays thievish hands on it, for then it invokes the black side of its nature and brings down upon the thief nothing but evil. Such exact justice is unarguably desirable in a story of piracy which, while boasting no moonstones—although there were buckets of other gems—did reach its apogee in Augustus Caesar's month, which is the moonstone's month. And the poppy springs from the blood of the slain, its scarlet blooms growing thickest on battlefields and in places of carnage.

So it is a poetic duty to report that there is murder in this August tale, too.

The sea-robber involved was master of the galley *Adventure,* a Scotsman who was thoroughly hanged in London's Execution Dock two centuries and a half ago —alas, on a day in May—and whose name ever since has stood for piracy in general. Ellery had tangled with historical characters before, but never with one so exciting as this; and it must be confessed that he embarked on the case of Captain Kidd's treasure with a relish more suitable to a small boy in his first hot pursuit of Mr. Legrand's golden *scarabaeus* than to a weary workman in words and the case-hardened son of a modern New York policeman.

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And then there was Eric Ericsson.

Ericsson was that most tragic of men, an explorer in an age when nothing of original note remained on earth to be explored. He had had to content himself with being, not the first in anything, but the farthest, or the highest, or the deepest. Where five channels in the Northwest Passage were known, Ericsson opened a sixth. He found a peak in Sikang Province of western China, in the Amne Machin Range, which was almost a thousand feet higher than Everest, but he lost his instruments and his companions and Mount Everest remained on the books the highest mountain on the planet.

Ericsson went farther and wider in the great Juf depression of the Sahara than the Citroën expedition, but this did not salve the nettling fact that other men had blazed the trail. And so it had gone all his life.

Now in middle age, broken in health, Ericsson rested on his bitter fame—honorary fellowships and medals from all the proper learned societies, membership and officership in clubs like the Explorers', Cosmos, Athenæum—and brooded over his memories in his New York apartment or, occasionally, at the fireside of the old stone house on the island he owned off Montauk Point, Long Island.

Ellery had heard the story of William Kidd and Ericsson's Island as a result of his first meeting with Ericsson at the Explorers' Club. Not from Ericsson—their introduction had been by the way and their conversation brief; if any discoveries had been made it was by Ericsson, who explored Ellery with far swifter economy than that explorer in other spheres would have believed possible of anyone but himself.

Then the large, burned, bowed man had shuffled off, leaving Ellery to quiz his host of the evening, a cartographer of eminence. When this amiable personage mentioned Ericsson's Island and the buccaneer of the *Adventure* in adjoining breaths, Ellery's bow plunged into the wind.

"You mean you've never heard that yarn?" asked the cartographer with the incredulity of the knowledgeable man. "I thought everyone had!" And he gripped his glass and set sail.

An Ericsson had taken possession of the little island in the fourth quarter of the Seventeenth Century, and he had managed to hold on to it through all the proprietary conflicts of that brawling era. Along the way the Northman acquired a royal patent which somehow weathered the long voyage of Colonial and American history.

"Now did Captain Kidd know Ericsson's Island?" asked the cartographer, settling himself as if for argument. "The circumstantial evidence is good. We know that in 1691, for instance, he was awarded

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£150 by the council of New York for his services during the disturbances in the colony 'after the rebellion of 1688.' And then, of course, there was the treasure found on Gardiner's Island off the tip of Long Island after Kidd's arrest in 1699 on a charge of murder and piracy. On a clear day you can see Ericsson's Island from Gardiner's Island with a glass. How could he have missed it?"

"It's your story," said Ellery judicially. "Go on."

William Kidd served respectably against the French in the West Indies, the cartographer continued, and in 1695 he was in London. Recommended as fit to command a vessel for the king, Captain Kidd received the royal commission to arrest all freebooters and *boucaniers,* and he sailed the galley *Adventure* from Plymouth in 1696 into a life, not of arresting pirates, but of outpirating them.

"The rest is history," said the cartographer, "although some of it is dubious history. We do know that in 1698 or thereabout he was in these parts in a small sloop. Well, the story has persisted for over two hundred and fifty years that during this period—when Kidd deserted the *Adventure* in Madagascar and took to the sloop, eventually working his way to these waters—he paid a visit to Ericsson's Island."

"To Gardiner's Island," corrected Ellery.

"*And* Ericsson's," said his host stubbornly. "Why not? About £14,000 was recovered from Kidd's vessel and from Gardiner's Island afterward; there must have been a great deal more than that. Why, John Avery—'Long Ben'—once grabbed off 100,000 pieces of eight in a single haul, and a Mogul's daughter to boot!

"What happened to the rest of Kidd's booty? Is it likely he'd have cached it all in one place? He knew he was in for serious trouble—he tried to bribe Governor Bellomont, you'll recall. And with Ericsson's Island so handy . . ."

"What's the story?" murmured Ellery.

"Oh, that he put into the cove there with a small boat one night, by a ruse got into the Ericsson house—the original's still standing, by the way, beautifully preserved—gave Ericsson and his family fifteen minutes to get off the island, and used the place as his headquarters for a few days. When Kidd cleared out, to be seized and shipped to England shortly after, the Ericssons went back to their island—"

"And perforated it fore and aft and amidships for the treasure Kidd presumably buried there," said Ellery.

"Well, certainly," said the cartographer peevishly. "Wouldn't you have?"

"But they never found it."

"Neither they nor their heirs or assigns. But that doesn't mean it isn't there, Queen."

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"Doesn't mean it is, either."

Nevertheless, Ellery went home that night feeling as if he had spent the evening in a hurricane off the Spanish Main, clinging to the wild rigging.

It was not quite two weeks later, in a mid-August spell of Dry Tortugan weather, that Eric Ericsson telephoned. The explorer sounded remote, as if deep—at least six fathoms deep—affairs were on his mind.

"Could you see me confidentially, Mr. Queen? I know you're a busy man, but if it's possible—"

"Are you calling from town, Mr. Ericsson?"

"Yes."

"You come right on over!"

Nikki could not understand Ellery's excitement. "Buried treasure," she sniffed. "A grown man."

"Women," pontificated Mr. Queen, "have no imagination."

"I suppose that's true," said his secretary coolly, "if you mean the kind that heats up at a bucket of nasty gore and a couple of rum-soaked yo-ho-hos. Who ever heard of a lady pirate?"

"Two of the bloodiest pirates in the business were Anne Bonny and Mary Read."

"Then they were no ladies!"

Twenty minutes later the doorbell rang and Nikki, still sniffishly, admitted the owner of the island whose clamshells had once been crunched by the tread of Captain Kidd and his cutthroat crew.

"Glad you didn't waste any time getting here, Mr. Ericsson," said Ellery enthusiastically. "The sooner we get going on it—"

"You know why I'm here?" The explorer frowned.

"It doesn't take a math shark to put a couple of twos together."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Oh, come, Mr. Ericsson," chortled Ellery. "If it's Nikki you're worried about, I assure you that not only is she the custodian of all my secrets, she also has no interest whatsoever in buried treasure."

"Buried treasure?" Ericsson waved a charred hand impatiently. "That's not what I wanted to see you about."

"It's . . . not?"

"I've never put any stock in that yarn, Mr. Queen. In fact, the whole picture of Kidd as a pirate in my opinion is a myth and a historical libel. Kidd was the goat of a political intrigue, I'm convinced, not a pirate at all. Dalton's book presented some pretty conclusive evidence. If it's real pirates you're after, look up Bartholomew Roberts. Roberts took over four hundred ships during his career."

"Then the story of Kidd's seizure of Ericsson's Island—?"

"He may have visited the island around 1698, but if it was to bury anything I've never seen the slightest evidence of it. Mr. Queen, I'd like to tell you why I came."

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"Yes," sighed Ellery, and Nikki felt almost sorry for him.

Ericsson's problem involved romance, it appeared, but not the kind that glittered under pirate moons. His only sister, a widow, had died shortly after Ericsson's retirement, leaving a daughter. The explorer's relationship with his sister had been distant, and he had last seen her child, Inga, as a leggy creature of twelve.

But at the sister's funeral he found himself embraced as "Uncle Eric" by a golden Norse goddess of nineteen. His niece was alone in the world and she had clung to him. Ericsson, a bachelor, found the girl filling a need he had never dreamed existed. Inga left college and came to live with him as his ward, the consolation of his empty retirement, and the sole heir of his modest fortune.

At first they were inseparable—in Ericsson's New York household, at the stone house on the island during long week-ends. But Inga began to glow, and the moths came. They were young moths and they rather interfered. So Ericsson—selfishly, he admitted—had his yacht refurbished and sailed Inga away on a cruise of the Caribbean.

"Biggest mistake of my life," the explorer shrugged. "We stopped over in the Bahamas, and there Inga met a young Britisher, Anthony Hobbes-Watkins, who was living a gentlemanly beachcomber sort of existence out on Lyford Cay, at the other end of New Providence Island. It was Inga's first serious love affair. I should have taken her away immediately. When I woke up, it was too late."

"Elopement?" asked Nikki hopefully.

"No, no, Miss Porter, it was a cathedral wedding. I couldn't stand in Inga's way. And I really had nothing definite to go on."

Ellery said, "There's something fishy about Hobbes-Watkins?"

"I don't know, Mr. Queen." Ericsson's heavy, burned-out face remained expressionless, but not his eyes. "That's what I want you to find out."

"What do you know about him?"

"Only what he's told me and a few things I've picked up. Captain in the RAF during the war, and not much of anything since—I don't hold that against him, it's a rocky world. All the British upper-class attainments—shoots well, plays an earnest game of polo, grouses about the fading star of empire; that sort of thing. Knew all the right people in Nassau; but he hadn't been there long.

"His father, a Colonel Hobbes-Watkins, came on from somewhere—England, he said—for the wedding," continued the explorer. "A stout, red, loud, horsy specimen, nearly a caricature of his type. They seem to have plenty of money, so it can't be that. But there *is* . . . something, a mystery, a vagueness about them that keeps disturbing

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me. They're like figures on a movie screen—you see them move, you hear them talk, but they never seem flesh and blood. Two-dimensional . . . I'm not saying this well," said Ericsson, flushing. "When a man's tramped mountains and deserts and jungles all his life, as I have, he develops an extra sense." He looked up. "I don't trust them."

"I suppose," said Nikki, "your niece does."

"Well, Inga's young and unsophisticated, and she's very much in love. That's what makes it so awkward. But she's become important to me, and for her sake I can't let this go on unless I'm satisfied she hasn't made some awful mistake."

"Have you noticed anything different since the wedding, Mr. Ericsson?" asked Ellery. "A change in their attitude?"

The explorer scraped the bark of his neck with a limp handkerchief. But he said defiantly, "They whisper together."

Ellery raised his brows.

But Ericsson went on doggedly. "Right after the wedding Colonel Hobbes-Watkins left for the States. On business, he said. I gave the yacht to Inga and Tony for a three-week honeymoon. On their way back they picked me up in Nassau and we sailed up to New York, meeting Tony's father here . . . On three different occasions I've come on the Hobbes-Watkinses having whispered conversations which break off like a shot. I don't like it, Mr. Queen. I don't like it to such an extent," said Ericsson quietly, "that I've deliberately kept us all in the city instead of doing the sensible thing in this heat and living down at the island.

"My island is pretty isolated, and it would make the ideal setting for a . . . Instead of which, Tony and Inga have my apartment, I'm stopping at one of my clubs, and the Colonel is sweating it out politely in a midtown hotel—business, unspecified, still keeping him in the States. But I can't stall any longer. Inga's been after me now for weeks to shove off for the Point, and she's beginning to look at me queerly. I've had to promise we'd all go down this week-end for the rest of the summer."

"It would make the ideal setting," said Ellery, "for a what?"

"You'll think I'm cracked."

"For a what, Mr. Ericsson?"

"All right!" The explorer gripped the arms of his chair. "For a murder," he muttered.

Nikki stared. "Oh, I'm sure—" she began.

But Ellery's foot shifted and somehow crushed Nikki's little toe. "Murder of whom, Mr. Ericsson?"

"Inga! Me! Both of us—I don't know!" He controlled himself with an effort. "Maybe I'm hallucinated. But I tell you those two are scoundrels and my island would be a perfect place for whatever they're up to. What I'd like you to do, Mr. Queen, is come down this week-

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end for an indefinite stay. Will you?"

Ellery glanced at his secretary; Nikki was often his umpire when he was playing the game of working. But she was regarding him with the grim smile of a spectator.

"Come down, too, Miss Porter," said the explorer, misinterpreting the glance. "Inga will love having you. Besides, your coming will make it appear purely social. I don't want Inga having the least suspicion that . . . Don't bother about a wardrobe; we lead the most primitive life on the island. And there's plenty of room; the house has tripled its original size. About the fee, Mr. Queen—"

"We'll discuss fees," murmured Ellery, "when there's something to charge a fee for. We'll be there, Mr. Ericsson. I can't leave, however, before Saturday morning. When are you planning to go down?"

"Friday." The explorer looked worried.

"I don't imagine they'd try anything the very first night," said Ellery soothingly. "And you're not exactly a helpless old gaffer."

"Good lord! You don't think it's myself I'm concerned about! It's Inga . . . married and . . ." Ericsson stopped abruptly. Then he smiled and rose. "Of course you're right. I'll have the launch waiting for you at Montauk Point. You don't know how this relieves me."

"But won't your niece suspect something by the mere fact of Ellery's being invited down?" asked Nikki. "Unless, Ellery, you cook up one of your stories."

"How's this?" beamed Ellery. "I met Mr. Ericsson at the Explorers' Club recently, heard the family tale about Captain Kidd's treasure, I couldn't resist it, and I'm coming down to try to solve a two-hundred-and-sixty-year-old mystery. Simple?"

"Simply perfect," exclaimed Ericsson. "Inga's had them half believing this yarn ever since the Bahamas, and if I talk it up for the rest of the week you'll have them under your feet—they'll follow you around like tourists. See you both Saturday."

"It's simple, all right," said Nikki when the explorer had gone. "The simple truth! Shall I pack your extra cutlass, my bucko—and a couple of all-day suckers?"

Eric Ericsson and his niece met them at Montauk Point on Saturday morning and hurtled them over blue water in a noisy launch. It was hard to think of wickedness. Inga was a big solid blonde girl with the uncomplicated loveliness of the North, friendly and charming and —Nikki thought—happy as a newlywed could be. The day was stainless, the sun brilliant, the horizon picketed with racing sails; a salt breeze blew the girls' hair about, and the world looked a jolly place.

Even Ericsson was composed, as if he had slept unexpectedly well or

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the presence of serene, golden-legged Inga gave him the strength to dissemble his fears.

"I think it's so thrilling," Inga cried over the roar of the launch. "And Tony and the Colonel have talked of nothing else since Uncle Eric told us why you were coming down, Mr. Queen. Do you really feel there's hope?"

"I try to," Ellery shouted. "By the way, I'm disappointed. I thought your husband and father-in-law might be with you in the launch."

"Oh, that's Uncle Eric's fault," the girl said, and the explorer smiled. "He kidnaped me before I could scream for help."

"Guilty." Ericsson's grip on the wheel gave the lie to his smile. "I don't see much of you now that you're Mrs. Hobbes-Watkins."

"Darling, I'm glad you kidnaped me. I really am."

"Even though Mr. Hobbes-Watkins is probably fit to be tied?"

Inga looked happy.

But Nikki, the sun notwithstanding, felt a chill. Ericsson had obviously been afraid to leave Inga alone on the island with her husband and father-in-law.

Ellery kept chattering to Inga about the paragon she had married, while Ericsson stood quietly over the wheel. Nikki could have told the great man that he was wasting his celebrated breath: the girl was in the first heaven of wedded bliss, where the beloved hangs in space clothed in perfect light and there is no past.

From the horizon rose a seaweed-hung otter with a fish in its mouth, which changed rapidly into a long low-lying island thinly wooded and running down to a white beach and a pretty cove. As the launch drew near, they made out a shed, a boat-house, and a jetty.

A lank, disjointed something stuck up from the jetty like a piece of driftwood. It turned surprisingly into a one-legged old man. His left leg was gone at the knee; the trouser of his bleached jeans was pinned back over the stump; and to the stump there was strapped a crude, massive pegleg. With a skin resembling the shed's corrugated roof, a nose that was a twist of bone, crafty and secretive eyes, and a greasy bandana tied behind his ears against the sun, the peglegged old man looked remarkably like a pirate; and Nikki said so.

"That's why we call him Long John," Inga said as her uncle maneuvered the launch toward the jetty. "At least Tony and I do. Uncle Eric calls him Fleugelheimer, or something as ridiculous, though I suppose it's his name. He's not very bright, and he has no manners at all. Hi, Long John!" she called. "Catch the line."

The old man hopped sidewise with great agility and caught the line, poorly tossed, in his powerful right hand. Immediately he wheel-

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ed on Ericsson, his bony jaws grinding.

"Bloodsucker!" he yelled.

"Now, John," said the explorer with a sigh.

"When ye givin' me more money?"

"John, we have guests . . ."

"Or d'ye want me to quit? Ye want me to quit!"

"Make the line fast," said Ericsson with a faint smile.

"I'm a poor man," whined the old pirate, obeying. Suddenly he squinted sidewise at Ellery. "This the great detecative?"

"Yes, John."

"Henh!" said Long John, and he spat into the water, grinning evilly. He seemed to have forgotten all about his grievance.

"He's been on the island for years," Ericsson explained as they went up a rough path in the woods. "My caretaker. Surly old devil—not all there. He's a miser—hoards every penny I give him, and keeps dunning me for more with the regularity of a parrot. I ignore him and we get along fine."

And there was the stone house at the hump of the island's back. Clean wings stretched from a central building whose stones were grimy with weathered age. The old part of the house rose in a clapboard tower. The tower was square, with several small windows from which, Ellery thought, the whole island and a great spread of the sea must be visible. Undoubtedly the lookout tower of the original structure.

To one side of the house someone —Ericsson, or one of his more recent forebears—had built a rough but comfortable terrace. It was paved with oyster shells and there was a huge barbecue pit.

Two men—one portly and middle-aged, the other slim and young —rose from deck chairs waving frosty glasses.

And the instant Ellery laid eyes on the Hobbes-Watkinses he knew Eric Ericsson had been right.

It was hard to say why. They were almost professionally British, especially Colonel Hobbes-Watkins, but that did not account for it; and for the rest of the day Ellery devoted himself to this riddle. He did not solve it.

On the surface the men were plausible. Inga's husband was handsome in a thin, underdone way; he slouched and lolled as if he were hopelessly tired; speech seemed forced out of him; and he drank a good deal. This was the very picture of the young postwar European, spoiled, sick, and disenchanted. Still . . .

The elder Hobbes-Watkins was Colonel Blimp to the life, fussing and blustery and full of old-fashioned prejudices. A warmed-over mutton roast, as Nikki promptly dubbed him in a mumble. But there was something in the Colonel's bloated eye and occasionally in his

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blasting tone that had a lean and cynical energy in it, not at all in character.

During the afternoon Ellery, playing his role of historical detective, set off on a survey of the island. Inga, Tony, and the Colonel insisted on accompanying him.

Long John was fishing from a dory off the cove. When he spied them, he deliberately turned his back.

Ellery began to saunter along the beach, the others trotting eagerly behind.

"Needn't be bashful," he called, mindful of Inga between the two ogres at his back. "I'm merely casing the joint. Come up here, Inga."

"Casing the joint," wheezed Colonel Hobbes-Watkins. "Very good, haha! But I say, won't we trample the clues?"

"Not much danger of that, Colonel," said Ellery cheerfully, "after more than two and a half centuries. Inga, do join me."

"Glad I ambled along," said Tony Hobbes-Watkins in a languid voice. It sounded queerly dutiful for a groom. Ellery was conscious of the man's eyes; they kept a staring watch.

They went around the island in an hour. It was long and narrow and swelled to a ridge in the middle. The vegetation was scrubby and poor. There was no close anchorage except off the cove. None of the trees, which might have been landmarks, looked old; the island was exposed to the sea, and centuries of winter gales had kept it pruned.

"I don't suppose," Ellery asked Inga as they climbed the path back to the house in the dusk, "the story has ever had any documentation? Chart, map—anything like that?"

"Nothing that still exists. But it's said that there was once a letter or diary page or something left by the 1698 Ericsson—it's been lost, if it ever existed at all—telling about the clue in Captain Kidd's room, and of course that's been the big mystery ever since."

"Clue? Kidd's room?" exclaimed Ellery. "No one's mentioned that!"

"Didn't Eric tell you?" murmured the younger Englishman. "Fantastic fellow, Eric. No imagination."

"I wondered why you hadn't steamed up there immejiately," panted the Colonel. "Fancy your uncle's not telling Mr. Queen the *most exciting part of it*, Inga! It's the chamber the pirate watched the sea from when he took the island over—didn't you say, my dear?"

"The tower room," said Inga, pointing through the dusk. "*That* was in the lost letter, and the reference to the clue Kidd left there."

"Clue left in the tower room?" Ellery squinted through the twilight hungrily. "And that's the original room up there, Inga?"

"Yes."

"What was the clue?"

But the terrace and Long John at

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the barbecue pit intervened; and since the one-legged caretaker was brandishing a veritable trident as he glowered at the latecomers, Ellery was not answered.

They had dinner. A great moon rose, and the air turned chilly. Ellery wandered to the edge of the terrace with his plate, and a moment later Eric Ericsson joined him.

"Well?" the explorer asked.

"Nothing tangible, Mr. Ericsson. But I agree—there's something in the wind."

"What about tonight? I've put you next to the Colonel's room, and I have an automatic, but Inga . . . alone with . . ."

"I've already fixed that. By a happy coincidence Nikki is going to be so nervous tonight in this primeval setting that she'll just have to sleep with somebody. Since she's had a strict upbringing, that means with Inga, the only other female here. A dirty trick to play on a new husband," said Ellery dryly, "but Tony can console himself with the prospect of a good night's sleep in the room next to mine." Ericsson pressed Ellery's arm rather pathetically. "For the rest of the evening, Mr. Ericsson," murmured Ellery, "please follow my lead. I'm going to be treasure-hunting like mad."

"Ha. Caught you whispering," said a voice at Ellery's elbow; it was young Hobbes-Watkins with a glass in his hand. "Pumping Eric about that clue, eh, Queen?"

"We were just getting round to it," said Ellery. "Girls couldn't take it, I see." Inga and Nikki were gone.

"Driven to cover by the mosquitoes and gnats," boomed the Colonel, slapping himself. "Lovely children, but females, what? Ah, there, you dog, don't shake your head at your old bachelor father! The moon's bloody, and it's the hour for high adventure, didn't some chap say? About that clue, Mr. Queen . . ."

"Yes, you never said a word to me about Captain Kidd's room, Mr. Ericsson," said Ellery reproachfully. "What's all this about a clue he's supposed to have left up there?"

"It's characteristically cryptic," said the explorer, pouring coffee. "The legend says that just before Kidd was to be hanged in London he sent a letter to my ancestor admitting that he'd buried a treasure on Ericsson's Island in '98, and saying that 'to find it you must look through the eye of the needle.'"

"Eye of the needle," said Ellery. "Eye of which needle?"

"Ah!" said Colonel Hobbes-Watkins ominously. "There's the rub, as the Bard says. No one knows—eh, Ericsson?"

"I'm afraid not, Colonel. And no one ever will, because it's all moonshine."

"Don't see why you say that, Eric; at all," said Tony, almost energetically. "Could have been a needle!"

"Even if there had been," Erics-

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son smiled in his moonshine, "two hundred and sixty years make a large haystack."

"One moment!" said Ellery. "Look through the eye of the needle *in the tower room,* Mr. Ericsson?"

"That's how it goes."

"What's in that room?"

"Nothing at all. Just four walls, a floor, and a ceiling. I assure you, Mr. Queen, everything's been tried —unsuccessfully—from hunting for a peculiar rock formation to conjuring up a tree fork viewed from a certain angle from the windows."

Ellery stared up at the tower. Suddenly he sprang to his feet. "How do I get up there?"

"There's the sleuth for you!" cried Colonel Hobbes-Watkins, hurling himself from his chair. "Been itching to have a go at that ruddy room myself!"

"But Eric's been so discouraging," murmured his son.

Nikki and Inga had their heads together before the fireplace, where Long John was laying a fire. Inga fell behind to say something to her young husband, who glanced quickly at Nikki and then shrugged.

The explorer led the way up a tiny narrow coiling staircase, holding a kerosene lamp high. "The tower's never been electrified," he called down, his deep voice reverberating. "Better use those flashlights or you'll break your necks on these stairs."

"Eeee," said Nikki convincingly; but it was only a dried-up wasps' nest. The stairs sagged perilously at every step.

The climb ended in a little landing and a heavy door of blackened oak and hand-forged iron. Ericsson set his big shoulder to the door. It gave angrily. The lamp bobbed off.

"A couple of you had better stay on the landing. This floor may not hold up under so much weight. Come in, Mr. Queen."

It was scarcely more than a large closet with miniature square windows. A floor of dirt-glazed random boards, undulant like the sea; a raftered ceiling only a few inches above the men's heads; and four papered walls. And that was all, except for dust and cobwebs. The windows, of imperfectly blown glass, were closed.

"Open them, Ellery," choked Nikki from the doorway. "You can't breathe up here."

"You can't open them," said Inga. "They've been stuck fast for six generations."

Ellery stood in the middle of the room looking about.

"Aren't you going to get down on all fours, Mr. Queen?" bellowed the Colonel from the landing. "Like the fellow from Baker Street?"

"I find these walls much more interesting."

But the only thing Nikki could see on the walls was the wallpaper. The paper showed an imitation colored marble design on a grainy background—ugly as sin, Nikki

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thought, and even uglier for being faded and mildewed in great patches.

Ellery was at one of the walls now, actually caressing it, holding the lamp close to the marbled paper. Finally he began at a corner and went over the paper inch by inch, from ceiling to floor. At one point he examined something for a long time. Then he resumed his deliberate inspection, and he neither spoke nor looked around until he had completed his tour of the room.

"This wallpaper," he said. "Do you know, Mr. Ericsson, what you have here?"

"Dash it all, sir," interrupted the Colonel explosively, "are you treasure-hunting, or what?"

"The wallpaper?" Ericsson frowned. "All I know about it is that it's very old."

"To be exact, late Seventeenth Century," said Ellery. "This is genuine flock paper, made by the famous Dunbar of Aldermanbury. It's probably quite valuable."

"There's a treasure for you," wailed Inga.

"If so," shrugged her uncle, "it's the first I've run across on the island."

"There may be a second," said Ellery. "If we look through the eye of the needle."

"Don't tell me, Queen," said Inga's husband with what might have been animation, "you've spotted something."

"Yes."

The Hobbes-Watkinses made admiring sounds and Inga embraced her spouse. The explorer seemed stunned.

"Do you mean to say," demanded Nikki in a loud voice, "that you walk into a strange room and in ten minutes solve a mystery that's baffled everybody for two hundred and sixty years? Come, come, Mr. Q!"

"It's still only theory," said Ellery apologetically. "Inga, may I borrow a broom?"

"A broom!"

Inga, Tony, and the Colonel shouted chaotically down the tower stairs for Long John to fetch a broom. Then they ran into the little room and danced around Ellery, reckless of the aged floor.

"If the yarn is true at all," Ellery said, "Kidd couldn't have meant it literally when he instructed your ancestor, Mr. Ericsson, to 'look through the eye of the needle.' The early treasure hunters saw that at once, or they wouldn't have looked for peculiar rock and tree formations. They just didn't look close enough to home. It was under their noses all the time."

"*What* was under their noses all the time?" asked Nikki.

"The marble design on this wallpaper. Marble's unique characteristic is its veining. Look at these veins in the pattern. Some are long and thin, tapering to a point—"

"*Like needles,*" said the explorer slowly.

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Everyone began scuttling along a wall.

"But where's one with an opening?" shrieked Inga.

"An eye, an eye," mumbled the Colonel feverishly. "There must be one with an eye!"

"There is," said Ellery. "Just one, and here it is near this window."

And while they stared in awe at the place on the wall beyond the tip of Ellery's forefinger, Long John's boot and pegleg stumped into the tower room.

"Broom." He flung it.

Ellery seized it, placed the end of the broom handle on the open space in the needle-shaped vein, said with piety, "Let us pray," and pushed.

There was a ripping sound and the broom handle burst through the wallpaper and sank into the wall. Ellery kept pushing. The handle slid out of sight up to the sweep.

Ellery withdrew the broom and stepped back.

"Mr. Ericsson," he said, not without emotion, "the honor of the first look is yours."

"Well, don't just crouch there, Uncle Eric!" moaned Inga. "What do you see? There's a bright moon."

"I see," said Eric Ericsson slowly, "a bit of the northeast shoreline. You know the place, Inga. It's that postage-stamp patch of beach with the slight overhang of flat rock. Where you've sunbathed."

"It is!"

"It can't be. By George, not really —"

"What luck!"

There was a great deal of confusion.

Ellery said rapidly, "Mr. Ericsson, since you know just where the place is, take a hurricane lamp and a stake and get down there. We'll keep watch through the peephole. When we've got your lamp in the center of our sight, we'll signal with a flashlight three times from this window. Drive your stake into the sand at that point, and we'll join you there with shovels."

"I'll get 'em!" shrieked a voice; and they turned to see Long John's pegleg vanishing. Fifteen minutes later, with Inga sprinting ahead, they thrashed through the scrub toward the explorer's light.

They found Ericsson standing on an outcrop of silvery rock, smiling. "No hurry," he said. "And no treasure—not till low tide tomorrow morning, anyway."

Ericsson's stake was protruding from four and a half feet of ocean.

Nikki found herself able to play the part of a nervous city female with no difficulty at all. How could Inga *sleep?* she thought as she thrashed about in the twin bed. When in a few hours she was going to be the heiress of a pirate's treasure? . . . The *piracy* of that pirate —to bury it so that for half the elapsed time the Atlantic rolled over it. He ought to be hanged . . .

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Then Nikki remembered that he *had* been hanged; and that was her last thought until a hand clamped over her mouth and a light flashed briefly into her eyes and Ellery's voice said affectionately in her ear, "You certainly sleep soundly. Get into some clothes and join me outside. And don't wake anyone or I'll give you a taste of the cat."

Nikki slipped out of the house into a dead and lightless world. She could not even make out the terrace. But Ellery rose out of the void and led her down the path and into the woods, his grip forbidding noise. Not until they had gone several hundred yards did he turn on his flashlight, and even then he cupped its beam.

"Is it all right to talk now?" Nikki asked coldly. "What time is it? Where are we going? And why are you practically naked? And do you think this is cricket? After all, Ellery, it's not your treasure."

"It's not quite four, we're getting the jump on our friends, I expect it will be wet and mucky work, and pirate loot calls for pirate methods. Would you rather go back to bed?"

"No," said Nikki. "Though it all sounds pretty juvenile to me. How can you dig through sea water?"

"Low tide at 4:29 A.M.—I checked with a tide table at the house."

Nikki began to feel excited all over again.

And she almost burst into a yo-ho-ho when they came out on the flat rock and saw Ericsson's stake below them lapped by a mere inch or two of water.

The sun made its appearance with felicity. The first silver of fried-egg radiance slipped over the edge of the sea's blue plate just as Ellery's spade rang a sort of breakfast bell. Nikki, who was flat on the wet sand with her head in the hole, and Ellery, whose salted hair bobbed a foot below Nikki's chin, responded to the sound with hungry cries.

"It's a metal box, Nikki!"

"Whee!"

"*Don't* come down here! Get that windlass ready."

"Where? What? What's a windlass?"

"That drum up there for hoisting!" Before turning in the previous night the men had lugged all the portable paraphernalia they could find in the shed down to the site of the treasure. "And unwind the line and pay it down to me—"

"Yaaaaa-hoo!" Nikki ran around in her little bare feet madly.

Twenty minutes later they knelt panting on the sand at the edge of the hole, staring at a brassbound iron chest with a fat convex lid. It was a black and green mass of corruption. Shreds of crumbled stuff told where leather had once been strapped. And the chest was heavy —

"Can you open it?" whispered Nikki.

Ellery set the heels of his hands

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on the edge of the lid and got his shoulders ready. The lid cracked off like a rotten nutshell.

Nikki gulped. The celestial egg was sunnyside up now, and beneath it a million little frying lights danced.

The chest was heaped with jewels.

"Diamonds," said Nikki dreamily. "Rubies. Emeralds. Pearls. Sapphires. So pretty. Look, Ellery. The booty of a real pirate. Wrenched from the throats and arms of dead Spanish women—"

"And the jewels in turn wrenched from their settings," muttered Ellery, "most of which were probably melted down. But here are some they overlooked. An empty gold setting. A silver one—"

"Here are more silver ones, Ellery . . ."

"Those aren't silver." Ellery picked one up. "This is platinum, Nikki."

"And look at those old coins! What's this one?"

"What?"

"This coin!"

"Oh? *El peso duro.* A piece of eight."

"Gosh . . ." Nikki suddenly thrust both hands into the chest.

And at this precise moment, through the young air of the island's morning, there came a dull crack, like the faraway slam of a door, and quickly after—so quickly it sounded like an echo of the first—another.

Ellery vaulted across the hole and leaped onto the flat rock. "Nikki, those were gunshots—"

"Huh?" Nikki was still on a quarterdeck with her jewels. "But Ellery—the treasure! You can't leave—"

But Ellery was gone.

They found Eric Ericsson in a robe and slippers lying in the doorway of Captain Kidd's roost, across the sill. He had tumbled headfirst into the empty room. In his right hand there was a .38 automatic pistol.

When they turned him over they saw a red hole in his forehead and red thickening fluid on the floor where the forehead had rested.

His body was still warm.

Ellery got up, and he said to the Hobbes-Watkinses and the marble-faced girl and the one-legged caretaker and Nikki, "We will go downstairs now and we will bar the tower door."

So they went downstairs quietly, and Ellery excused himself for a moment and disappeared in his room, and when he appeared again he had a police revolver in his hand.

"Nikki, you and Inga will take the launch and go over to the mainland and notify the Coast Guard and the Suffolk County police; there's no phone here. You won't come back until someone in authority can come with you. You gentlemen will wait here with me—with me, that is, and my shooting iron."

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Late that day Ellery came downstairs from the tower room and conferred with the Coast Guard officer and the police lieutenant from the mainland. Finally he said, "I appreciate that. It's something I owe poor Ericsson," and he waited until the people were brought in and seated before him.

The hearty bloat had gone out of Colonel Hobbes-Watkins; it was supplanted wholly by the muscular alertness Ellery had glimpsed the day before. Tony Hobbes-Watkins was very still, but he was no longer remotely languid. Inga was the palest projection of herself. Even Long John jiggled his pegleg nervously.

"Fifteen minutes or so after sunrise this morning," Ellery began, "just about the time I was down at the beach opening the treasure chest, Eric Ericsson was climbing the stairs in this house to the tower room. He was in his robe and slippers, and he carried his .38 automatic, with a full clip. His bedroom is below the tower shaft, which acts as an amplifier; evidently he was awakened by some noise from the tower room and decided to investigate. He took a gun with him because, even in his own house, he was afraid to be without it.

"Someone was in the tower room. What was this person doing there—at dawn, in an empty room? There is only one thing of utility in that room—the peephole I punctured through the wall last night. The person Ericsson heard was watching me through the peephole. Watching me dig up the treasure."

They stared at him.

"Ericsson came to the landing and flung open the door. The man at the peephole whirled. Maybe they talked for a little while; maybe Ericsson was put off his guard. His gun came down, and the man across the room whipped out a revolver and fired a .22 caliber bullet into Ericsson's head, killing him instantly.

"But Ericsson's automatic had come up again instinctively as his murderer drew, and it went off—a split second after the murderer's. We know two shots were fired almost simultaneously because Miss Porter and I heard them, and because we found a .22 caliber bullet in Ericsson's head and a .38 shell on the floor near Ericsson's .38 automatic."

And Ellery said clearly, "The murderer ran down the tower stairs after the shots, heard the others coming—you'd all been awakened by the shots and dashed out of your rooms at once, you've said—realized he was trapped, and thereupon did the only thing he could: he pretended that he, too, had been awakened by the shots and he ran *back* up the stairs with the rest of you. The gun he managed to dispose of before I got back to the house from the beach.

"One of you," said Ellery, "was the murderer."

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There was no sound in the room at all.

"We found the empty shell of Ericsson's discharged cartridge, as I say, near his body. He had fired once at his murderer, his automatic had ejected the shell, and the bullet had sped on its way. But here is the interesting fact: *we haven't found Ericsson's bullet.*"

Ellery leaned their way. "The tower room has been gone over all day by these officers and me. The bullet isn't there. There is no sign of it or its passage anywhere in the room—floor, walls, ceiling. The windows remain intact. They weren't open at the time of Ericsson's shot; as you remarked yesterday, Inga, they've been stuck fast for generations; and when we tried to open them today we failed.

"Nor did Ericsson's shot go wild. He was killed instantly, falling into the room headfirst; this means that when he fired, he was facing into the room. But just to be thorough, we went over the landing and the tower shaft, too. No bullet, no bullet mark, and no slightest opening through which the bullet might have passed."

"The peephole!" Nikki said involuntarily.

"No. There is considerable thickness to the walls. Ericsson in the doorway was at an extremely acute angle to the peephole. So while the bullet conceivably might have passed through the opening of the hole inside the tower room, it would have to have lodged inside the wall, or at least left some sign of its passage if it went through. We've torn down part of the wall to get a look inside. There is no bullet and no mark of a bullet.

"So the extraordinary fact is that while Ericsson's bullet must have struck something in that room, there is no sign of its having done so.

"Impossible? No. There is one logical explanation."

And Ellery said, "The bullet must have struck the only thing in that room which left it—the murderer. *One of you is concealing a bullet wound.*"

Ellery turned to the silent officers. "Let's have these three men stripped to the skin. And Nikki," he added, "go you somewhere with Inga—yes, I said Inga!—and do likewise."

And when the Colonel, raging, had been reduced to his fundamental pinkness, and his intent son stood similarly unclothed, and when what there was of Long John was grimly revealed also—and no wound was found on any of them, not so much as a scratch—Ellery merely blinked and faced the door through which Nikki had taken the murdered man's niece, the heir to his fortune and the treasure.

And the men redressed quickly, as if time were at their heels.

And when Nikki came back with Inga the police lieutenant asked,

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"Where is Mrs. Hobbes-Watkins's wound, Miss Porter?"

"Mrs. Hobbes-Watkins," replied Nikki, "has no wound."

"No . . .?"

"Maybe," said the Coast Guard officer awkwardly, "maybe you didn't look—uh—"

"And maybe I did," said Nikki with a sweet smile. "I work for the great Mr. Ellery Queen . . . you know?"

So now the two officers turned to look at the great Ellery Queen, but with no appreciation of his greatness at all.

And the Coast Guard officer said, "Well," and the police lieutenant from the mainland did not say even that but turned on his heel.

He turned immediately back. For Ellery was growling, "If that's the case, it's obvious who killed Ericsson."

And Ellery produced a cigarette and a lighter and said, "It all goes back to what I dug up this morning. And what did I dig up? An old chest, some old coins, a great number of unmounted gems, and some empty gem settings. Nikki, you saw the empty settings. Of which materials were they made?"

"Gold, silver, platinum—"

"Platinum," said Ellery, and he waved his cigarette gently. "The metal platinum wasn't introduced into Europe until about 1750—*over fifty years after Kidd supposedly buried the chestful of jewels on this island.* It's even worse than that: *platinum wasn't used for jewel settings until the year 1900,* at which time Kidd had been dead a hundred and ninety-nine years.

"A phony, gentlemen. A plant. The whole thing.

"The 'treasure' I unearthed this morning was buried in that sand very recently, I'm afraid. It has no more connection with William Kidd or any other Seventeenth Century pirate than the loose change in my pocket. Oh, it was meant to be taken for a treasure Kidd buried—the chest is authentically old, and some old coins were strewn among the jewels. But the jewels, as proved by those platinum settings, are modern.

"Why should modern jewels be buried on an island in the guise of old pirate treasure? Well, suppose they were stolen property. As stolen property, they'd have to be disposed of through fences for a small part of their value. But as buried treasure they could be disposed of openly at market prices. Very clever.

"Eric Ericsson, gentlemen, suspected that Anthony Hobbes-Watkins and his 'father,' Colonel Hobbes-Watkins—who's probably not his father at all—were not what they seemed. He was tragically right—they're a pair of European jewel thieves and, from the size of their accumulations, they must hold some sort of record for prowess in their exacting profession.

"They were cooling off in the Bahamas, wondering how best to

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turn their loot into cash, when Eric Ericsson and his niece stopped over at New Providence Island for a visit. Hearing the purely mythical yarn about how Kidd had buried treasure on Ericsson's Island two hundred and sixty years ago—treasure that had never been found—these worthies got a remarkably ingenious idea.

"They would plant the jewels in a real old chest—the Bahamas were the headquarters of the buccaneers and are full of pirate relics; they would salt the stolen jewels with a few authentic old coins; and they would bury the chest on Ericsson's Island, to be 'discovered' by them at a later date.

"The plan revolved about Inga's infatuation for this fellow here; he pretended to reciprocate her love and he married her. As Ericsson's sole heir, Inga would inherit his entire estate, which included this island, when Ericsson died. And as Inga's husband, Tony Hobbes-Watkins would control it all, and when Inga died—an early and untimely death, eh, gentlemen?—our friends would be in the rosy clear . . . I'm sorry, Inga, but it seems to be a day for crushing blows."

Inga sat pallid and blank, her hand clutching Nikki's.

"If you're trying to pin Ericsson's murder on me—" began the younger man in a swift and nasal voice.

But the Colonel said harshly, "Be quiet."

"Oh, that?" said Ellery. "Let's see. We know that Ericsson's bullet struck his murderer. Yet none of his four possible murderers exhibits a wound. Obviously, the bullet buried itself in a part of the murderer which couldn't be wounded—" Ellery smiled—*"which couldn't be wounded because it's not flesh and blood.* Only one of you four fits that curious specification. The one who uses a wooden leg—*stop him!"*

And when they had subdued the struggling caretaker and dug Eric Ericsson's bullet out of the pegleg, the police lieutenant—who was glassy-eyed—said, "Then these two men here, Mr. Queen—they weren't in on Ericsson's murder?"

"The whole plot, Lieutenant, was geared to Ericsson's murder," said Ellery, "though I'm afraid Long John rather jumped the gun.

"Don't you see that they were all in the plot together? How could our friend the Colonel, when he left the Bahamas after the wedding to smuggle the jewels into the States and get it to Ericsson's Island before the others sailed up to join him—how could the Colonel have planted the chest on the island unless the caretaker was taken into the gang? Also, the stage had to be set for the 'discovery' of the treasure: a hole bored through the tower room wall to sight on the chosen spot, the wallpaper doctored to implement the mythical clue of 'the needle's eye,' and so on—none of it possible unless Long John were declared in. He was, I suppose, to be

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paid off when Ericsson was disposed of and they got control, through Inga, of the estate and the island.

"What these gentry didn't figure on was the stupidity and avarice of Long John. They're far too clever operators to have planned to kill Ericsson the very night the treasure was located. Even if that had been their plan, they'd hardly have devised such a crude and obvious murder—especially with a trained investigator on the island. An 'accident' would have been more their style. At their leisure, under selected conditions—like a storm, say, and an overturned boat, perhaps even with Inga a victim of the same accident—in that way gaining their objective in one stroke and with no danger to themselves.

"But Long John is simple-minded and, as Ericsson told me, a miser. He just couldn't wait. He heard me leave in the dark, realized my purpose, saw the dawn coming up, and hurried to the tower room to spy on me. He watched me dig the jewels up, probably saw them sparkling in the sun. When Ericsson surprised him in the tower at that very moment, all he could see were those jewels and his share of them when Ericsson should be killed. So Long John killed him—then and there. Speeding up the great day . . .

"Haste makes waste, eh, Colonel? And Tony, I regret to inform you that I'm going to take your wife to the best lawyer in New York and see what can be done about an immediate annulment.

"And now, gentlemen, if you'll remove these pirates," said Ellery to the officers, but looking soberly at Inga, "Nikki and I have some holes to refill."

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Disney, Doris Miles	DARK ROAD	Popular Library	$.50	8/7
Eberhart, Mignon C.	WINGS OF FEAR	Popular Library	.50	8/17
MacDonald, John D.	THE DECEIVERS	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	7/29

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An unusual story for EQMM . . . Our Managing Editor told us the following curious anecdote: he once said to Judy Merril that he didn't understand a certain fantasy story which Miss Merril had selected for her annual "Best of S-F" anthology. Miss Merril was not disturbed, either as a reader or an editor. She replied, "Is it necessary to understand a fantasy? I didn't understand the story either. But I liked it."

Judy Merril has a point . . .

— The author of this strange story is a best-selling British novelist and the great-granddaughter of Charles Dickens—who, we think, would have agreed with Miss Merril about fantasies and would have liked his great-granddaughter's story . . .

TO REACH THE SEA

by MONICA DICKENS

IT COST $250. WHEN JANE BARLOW took courage to question the price, M. Marmaduc, who had made it, said, "I am an artist, Madame, a very sensitive man. Is Madam trying to say it is not worth it?"

And it was worth it. She wore the wig that evening—blue-black, shining, superb. The party was a little depressing, so when someone said, "I've been admiring your hair all evening," she took off the wig, for a joke, and things were gayer. Then she put it on again and presently asked her husband to take her home, because the gaiety had evaporated.

She loved the wig. It sat on a stand like Marie Antoinette's severed head, and when she wore it she saw women look at her as she came into a room, and she could see them wondering: Is it or isn't it? Either way they were envious.

Before long, however, the wig began to worry her. It didn't look right any more; there was too much of it, and her face looked small. She took it back to M. Marmaduc and told him, "I think it needs redressing. There's something wrong with it."

"I am an artist, Madame—there can be nothing wrong." But when she called for it a week later, he admitted, "I think it is a finished creation, but there was a little too much hair. I have take a soupcon off here, a flick off here—it is now perfect."

Jane wore it that night, and it was perfect. "Like living hair," John said. John was not her husband, but the man she wished she had met first. "It pales and narrows your face to a kind of tragic beauty."

Jane laughed, because they must never look as if they were talking

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seriously in corners; but she did feel a little tragic. They had agreed to be gay and sophisticated about their situation, but tonight it seemed to be closing in on her. Her husband looked at her admiringly across the room, but she felt afraid.

Jane came home after a month's holiday, not caring that her hair was a wreck from the sun and sea, because the wig was waiting. But the very first time she wore it, it seemed wrong again. She set it in pin curls on the severed head, left it for a week, then tried it on late at night after her husband was asleep. She sat in front of her dressing table, staring with dark strange eyes at the white face dwarfed by the glorious mass of black hair.

There was no doubt about it, absolutely no doubt at all. *The wig was growing.*

She snatched it off and put it quickly back on the dummy head in the box. It was her imagination. It must be. She left it on the shelf for three weeks; then one night, with a beating heart, she put it on again.

I am going mad, she thought. In a panic, she took scissors and hacked at the hair, gathering up the fallen bits in newspaper and running down to burn them in the furnace.

The wig was unwearable now, lopsidedly chopped. She wept, the uncontrollable sobs shaking her long after she had stuffed the box back on the shelf and gone brokenly to bed.

"Why do you never wear that expensive wig?" her husband asked, and John said, irked by her moodiness when they met in the discreetly shadowed bar, "Don't let yourself go, Janey. Put on that gorgeous wig again, and sparkle."

She went to another hairdresser, not M. Marmaduc, and had her hair deepened in color and teased into a huge frame for her nervous white face, and asked her husband, "How does the wig look?" For no one must ever know she could not wear it.

She would not look at it. Every time she opened the closet, her eyes flew to the tall box on the shelf. Her hands went up, impulsively, but she forced them down.

She waited another two months. When her husband was away, she took down the box and opened it.

It was not a shock. It was with a sigh of submissive recognition that she saw that the hair had grown at least two inches—uneven, ragged at the ends, but well below her ears when she put the wig on.

She went out and walked about the streets for half the night, not knowing where she went, knowing only that she was looking for something she would never find.

Many nights in the following months, when her husband was asleep, she would put on the growing wig and slip out of the house to wander through the streets, across the bridges, along the river wall, the long unkempt black hair

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shrouding her back and shoulders and half veiling her face.

They found her in the river, one cold dawn, her own hair strung like seaweed across her dead face. A boy digging for bait found the wig caught under a jetty, its long hair floating out in the murky water to try to reach the sea . . .

"It will cost Madame two hundred and fifty dollars."

"All right," said the customer. "But where does the hair come from?"

"Northern Italy. I used to get beautiful black hair from Sicily, but I will not buy from that salesman any more. He told me, Madame, about a girl—the young bride of a rich old man. When the old man found her with her lover, he knifed the boy and threw the body from a boat into the sea. Then he cut off all his wife's long black hair, the way they did in the war, for fraternizing.

"The young bride walked out into the sea, crazy with sorrow, looking for her lover. The salesman bought the hair. What a pig. How could I buy any more from such a brute? I am an artist, Madame, a very sensitive man."

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a detective *SHORT NOVEL* by

RAYMOND CHANDLER

This detective short novel—"The Curtain" by Raymond Chandler—first appeared in the September 1936 issue of Black Mask magazine. It is perhaps a perfect specimen of the Black Mask type of hard-boiled mystery story, full of action, danger, and suspense, all brittle-hard, and written in what has been called "the poetry of violence." In a phrase, not mere dud and thunder, but plenty of blood and wonder.

In the never-to-be-forgotten heyday of Black Mask, when Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler were (to use Chandler's own phrase about Hammett) the "ace performers," the so-called hard-boiled detective story seemed to be a new 'tec type. Writers like Hammett and Chandler appeared to have broken away from tradition and created a new tradition; but in the perspective of the history of the genre it is perhaps safer to say that the hard-boiled detective story really didn't break, or even crack, the original classic mold. What Hammett and Chandler and others did was to invent a fresh, exciting, and important variation of the classic pattern and the classic technique, and more obvious to us now, a new way of projecting the older fundamentals.

The detective-hero in "The Curtain" is named Carmady. But actually he represents a sort of halfway man in the evolution of Raymond Chandler's final version of the private eye. Carmady is one of the forerunners of Chandler's most famous detective, Philip Marlowe—along with Chandler's earlier nameless protagonist and John Dalmas and John Evans. And in these stages of the evolution, the seeds of Philip Marlowe, Chandler's modern knight-in-shining-armor, are all clearly visible to the naked eye. Here is the lonely, dedicated common man, dealing courageously with crime, violence, and evil; here is the helper of the underdog, the protector of the weak, the salvager or savior of misfits and lost souls; here is the investigator of murder and mystery who is socially conscious, fanatically ethical, indifferent to money, and passionately on the side of justice (as distinguished from the law); here is the tough, durable, American rugged individualist, the rough-diamond detective of destiny . . .

And today, as in the 30s and 40s and 50s, reading about manhunters (and womanhunters) like Philip Marlowe, Sam Spade, the Conti-

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nental Op, et al. is still a highly charged and sometimes disturbingly emotional experience . . .

THE CURTAIN

by RAYMOND CHANDLER

THE FIRST TIME I EVER SAW LARRY Batzel he was drunk outside Sardi's in a second-hand Rolls-Royce. There was a tall blonde with him who had eyes you wouldn't forget. I helped her argue him out from under the wheel so that she could drive.

The second time I saw him he didn't have any Rolls-Royce or any blonde or any job in pictures. All he had was the jitters and a suit that needed pressing. He remembered me. He was that kind of drunk.

I bought him enough drinks to do him some good and gave him half my cigarettes. I used to see him from time to time "between pictures." I got to lending him money. I don't know just why. He was a big handsome brute with eyes like a cow and something innocent and honest in them. Something I don't get much of in my business.

The funny part was he had been a liquor runner for a pretty hard mob before Repeal. He never got anywhere in pictures, and after a while I didn't see him around any more.

Then one day out of the clear blue I got a check for all he owed me and a note that he was working on the tables—gambling not dining—at the Dardanella Club, and to come out and look him up. So I knew he was back in the rackets.

I didn't go to see him, but I found out somehow or other that Joe Mesarvey owned the place, and that Joe Mesarvey was married to the blonde with the eyes, the one Larry Batzel had been with in the Rolls that time. I still didn't go out there.

Then very early one morning there was a dim figure standing by my bed, between me and the windows. The blinds had been pulled down. That must have been what wakened me. The figure was large and had a gun.

I rolled over and rubbed my eyes.

"Okay," I said sourly. "There's twelve bucks in my pants and my wrist watch cost twenty-seven fifty. You couldn't get anything on that."

The figure went over to the window and pulled a blind aside an inch and looked down at the street. When he turned again, I saw that it was Larry Batzel.

His face was drawn and tired and he needed a shave. He had dinner clothes on still and a dark double-

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breasted overcoat with a dwarf rose drooping in the lapel.

He sat down and held the gun on his knee for a moment before he put it away, with a puzzled frown, as if he didn't know how it got into his hand.

"You're going to drive me to Berdoo," he said. "I've got to get out of town. They've put the pencil on me."

"Okay," I said. "Tell me about it."

I sat up and felt the carpet with my toes and lit a cigarette. It was a little after five thirty.

"I jimmied your lock with a piece of celluloid," he said. "You ought to use your night latch once in a while. I wasn't sure which was your flop and I didn't want to rouse the house."

"Try the mailboxes next time," I said. "But go ahead. You're not drunk, are you?"

"I'd like to be, but I've got to get away first. I'm just rattled. I'm not so tough as I used to be. You read about the O'Mara disappearance of course."

"Yeah."

"Listen, anyway. If I keep talking I won't blow up. I don't think I'm spotted here."

"One drink won't hurt either of us," I said. "The Scotch is on the table there."

He poured a couple of drinks quickly and handed me one. I put on a bathrobe and slippers. The glass rattled against his teeth when he drank.

He put his empty glass down and held his hands tight together.

"I used to know Dud O'Mara pretty well. We used to run stuff together down from Hueneme Point. We even carried the torch for the same girl. She's married to Joe Mesarvey now. Dud married five million dollars. He married General Dade Winslow's rickety-rackety divorcee daughter."

"I know all that," I said.

"Yeah. Just listen. She picked him out of a speak, just like I'd pick up a cafeteria tray. But he didn't like the life. I guess he used to see Mona. He got wise Joe Mesarvey and Lash Yeager had a hot can racket on the side. They knocked him off."

"The hell they did," I said. "Have another drink."

"No. Just listen. There's just two points. The night O'Mara pulled down the curtain—no, the night the papers got it—Mona Mesarvey disapeared too. Only she didn't. They hid her out in a shack a couple of miles beyond Realito in the orange belt. Next door to a garage run by a heel named Art Huck, a hot car drop. I found out. I trailed Joe there."

"What made it your business?" I asked.

"I'm still soft on her. I'm telling you this because you were pretty swell to me once. You can make something of it after I blow. They hid her out there so it would look

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as if Dud had blown with her. Naturally the cops were not too dumb to see Joe after the disappearance. But they didn't find Mona. They have a system on disappearances and they play the system."

He got up and went over to the window again, looking through the side of the blind.

"There's a blue sedan down there I think I've seen before," he said. "But maybe not. There's a lot like it."

He sat down again. I didn't speak.

"This place beyond Realito is on the first side road north from the Foothill Boulevard. You can't miss it. It stands all alone, the garage and the house next door. There's an old cyanide plant up above there. I'm telling you this—"

"That's point one," I said. "What was the second point?"

"The punk that used to drive for Lash Yeager lit out a couple of weeks back and went East. I lent him fifty bucks. He was broke. He told me Yeager was out to the Winslow estate the night Dud O'Mara disappeared."

I stared at him. "It's interesting, Larry. But not enough to break eggs over. After all, we do have a police department."

"Yeah. Add this. I got drunk last night and told Yeager what I knew. Then I quit the job at the Dardanella. So somebody shot at me outside where I live when I got home. I've been on the dodge ever since. Now, will you drive me to Berdoo?"

I stood up. It was May but I felt cold. Larry Batzel looked cold, even with his overcoat on.

"Absolutely," I said. "But take it easy. Later will be much safer than now. Have another drink. You don't *know* they knocked O'Mara off."

"If he found out about the hot car racket, with Mona married to Joe Mesarvey, they'd have to knock him off. He was that kind of guy."

I stood up and went toward the bathroom. Larry went over to the window again.

"It's still there," he said over his shoulder. "You might get shot at riding with me."

"I'd hate that," I said.

"You're a good sort of heel, Carmady. It's going to rain. I'd hate like hell to be buried in the rain, wouldn't you?"

"You talk too damn much," I said, and went into the bathroom.

It was the last time I ever spoke to him.

I heard him moving around while I was shaving, but not after I got under the shower, of course. When I came out he was gone. I padded over and looked into the kitchenette. He wasn't in there. I grabbed a bathrobe and peeked out into the hall. It was empty except for a milkman starting down the back stairs with his wiry tray of

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bottles, and the fresh folded papers leaning against the shut doors.

"Hey," I called out to the milkman, "did a guy just come out of here and go by you?"

He looked back at me from the corner of the wall and opened his mouth to answer. He was a nice-looking boy with fine large white teeth. I remember his teeth well, because I was looking at them when I heard the shots.

They were not very near or very far. Out back of the apartment house, by the garages, or in the alley, I thought. There were two quick, hard shots and then the riveting machine. A burst of five or six, all a good chopper should ever need. Then the roar of the car going away.

The milkman shut his mouth as if a winch controlled it. His eyes were huge and empty-looking at me. Then he very carefully set his bottles down on the top step and leaned against the wall.

"That sounded like shots," he said.

All this took a couple of seconds and felt like half an hour. I went back into my place and threw clothes on, grabbed odds and ends off the bureau, barged out into the hall. It was still empty, even of the milkman. A siren was dying somewhere near. A bald head with a hangover under it poked out of a door and made a snuffling noise.

I went down the back stairs.

There were two or three people out in the lower hall. I went out back. The garages were in two rows facing each other across a cement space, then two more at the end, leaving a space to go out to the alley. A couple of kids were coming over a fence three houses away.

Larry Batzel lay on his face, with his hat a yard away from his head, and one hand flung out to within a foot of a big black automatic. His ankles were crossed, as if he had spun as he fell. Blood was thick on the side of his face, on his blond hair, especially on his neck. It was also thick on the cement yard.

Two radio cops and the milk driver and a man in a brown sweater and bibless overalls were bending over him. The man in overalls was our janitor.

I went up to them, about the same time the two kids from over the fence hit the yard. The milk driver looked at me with a queer, strained expression. One of the cops straightened up and said, "Either of you guys know him? He's still got half his face."

He wasn't talking to me. The milk driver shook his head and kept on looking at me from the corner of his eyes. The janitor said, "He ain't a tenant here. He might of been a visitor. Kind of early for visitors, though, ain't it?"

"He's got party clothes on. You know your flophouse better'n I do," the cop said heavily. He got out a notebook.

The other cop straightened up too

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and shook his head and went toward the house, with the janitor trotting beside him.

The cop with the notebook jerked a thumb at me and said harshly, "You was here first after these two guys. Anything from you?"

I looked at the milkman. Larry Batzel wouldn't care, and a man has a living to earn. It wasn't a story for a prowl car anyway.

"I just heard the shots and came running," I said.

The cop took that for an answer. The milk driver looked up at the lowering gray sky and said nothing.

After a while I got back into my apartment and finished my dressing. When I picked my hat up off the window table by the Scotch bottle there was a small rosebud lying on a piece of scrawled paper.

The note said: "You're a good guy, but I think I'll go it alone. Give the rose to Mona, if you ever should get a chance. Larry."

I put those things in my wallet, and braced myself with a drink.

About three o'clock that afternoon I stood in the main hallway of the Winslow place and waited for the butler to come back. I had spent most of the day not going near my office or apartment, and not meeting any homicide men. It was only a question of time until I had to come through, but I wanted to see General Dade Winslow first. He was hard to see.

Oil paintings hung all around me, mostly portraits. There were a couple of statues and several suits of time-darkened armor on pedestals of dark wood. High over the huge marble fireplace hung two bullet-torn—or moth-eaten—cavalry pennants crossed in a glass case, and below them the painted likeness of a thin, spry-looking man with a black beard and mustachios and full regimentals of about the time of the Mexican War. This might be General Dade Winslow's father. The general himself, though pretty ancient, couldn't be quite that old.

Then the butler came back and said General Winslow was in the orchid house and would I follow him, please.

We went out of the French doors at the back and across the lawns to a big glass pavilion well beyond the garages. The butler opened the door into a sort of vestibule and shut it when I was inside, and it was already hot. Then he opened the inner door and it was really hot.

The air steamed. The walls and ceiling of the greenhouse dripped. In the half light enormous tropical plants spread their blooms and branches all over the place, and the smell of them was almost as overpowering as the smell of boiling alcohol.

The butler, who was old and thin and very straight and white-haired,

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held branches of the plants back for me to pass, and we came to an opening in the middle of the place. A large reddish Turkish rug was spread down on the hexagonal flagstones. In the middle of the rug, in a wheel chair, a very old man sat with a traveling rug around his body and watched us come.

Nothing lived in his face but the eyes. Black eyes, deep-set, shining, untouchable. The rest of his face was the leaden mask of death, sunken temples, a sharp nose, outward-turning ear lobes, a mouth that was a thin white slit. He was wrapped partly in a reddish and very shabby bathrobe and partly in the rug. His hands had purple fingernails and were clasped loosely, motionless on the rug.

The butler said, "This is Mr. Carmady, General."

The old man stared at me. After a while a sharp, shrewish voice said, "Place a chair for Mr. Carmady."

The butler dragged a wicker chair out and I sat down. I put my hat on the floor. The butler picked it up.

"Brandy," the general said. "How do you like your brandy, sir?"

"Anyway at all," I said.

He snorted. The butler went away. The general stared at me with his unblinking eyes. He snorted again.

"I always take champagne with mine," he said. "A third of a glass of brandy under the champagne, and the champagne as cold as Valley Forge. Colder, if you can get it colder."

A noise that might have been a chuckle came out of him.

"Not that I was at Valley Forge," he said. "Not quite that bad. You may smoke, sir."

I thanked him and said I was tired of smoking for a while. I got a handkerchief out and mopped my face.

"Take your coat off, sir. Dud always did. Orchids require heat, Mr. Carmady—like sick old men."

I took my coat off, a raincoat I had brought along. It looked like rain. Larry Batzel had said it was going to rain.

"Dud is my son-in-law. Dudley O'Mara. I believe you had something to tell me about him."

"Just hearsay," I said. "I wouldn't want to go into it, unless I had your okay, General Winslow."

The basilisk eyes stared at me. "You are a private detective. You want to be paid, I suppose."

"I'm in that line of business," I said. "But that doesn't mean I have to be paid for every breath I draw. It's just something I heard. You might like to pass it on yourself to the Missing Persons Bureau."

"I see," he said quietly. "A scandal of some sort."

The butler came back before I could answer. He wheeled a tea wagon in through the jungle, set it at my elbow, and mixed me a brandy and soda. He went away.

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I sipped the drink. "It seems there was a girl," I said. "He knew her before he knew your daughter. She's married to a racketeer now. It seems—"

"I've heard all that," he said. "I don't give a damn. What I want to know is where he is and if he's all right. If he's happy."

I stared at him popeyed. After a moment I said weakly, "Maybe I could find the girl, or the boys downtown could, with what I could tell them."

He plucked at the edge of his rug and moved his head about an inch. I think he was nodding. Then he said very slowly, "Probably I'm talking too much for my health, but I want to make something clear. I'm a cripple. I have two ruined legs and half my lower belly. I don't eat much or sleep much. I'm a bore to myself and a damn nuisance to everybody else. So I miss Dud. He used to spend a lot of time with me. Why, God only knows."

"Well—" I began.

"Shut up. You're a young man to me, so I can be rude to you. Dud left without saying goodbye to me. That wasn't like him. He drove his car away one evening and nobody has heard from him since. If he got tired of my fool daughter and her brat, if he wanted some other woman, that's all right. He got a brainstorm and left without saying goodbye to me, and now he's sorry. That's why I don't hear from him. Find him and tell him I understand. That's all—unless he needs money. If he does, he can have all he wants."

His leaden cheeks almost had a pink tinge now. His black eyes were brighter, if possible. He leaned back very slowly and closed his eyes.

I drank a lot of my drink in one long swallow. I said, "Suppose he's in a jam. Say, on account of the girl's husband. This Joe Mesarvey."

He opened his eyes and winked. "Not an O'Mara," he said. "It's the other fellow would be in a jam."

"Okay. Shall I just pass on to the Bureau where I heard the girl was?"

"Certainly not. They've done nothing. Let them go on doing it. Find him yourself. I'll pay you a thousand dollars—even if you only have to walk across the street. Tell him everything is all right here. The old man's doing fine and sends his love. That's all."

I couldn't tell him. Suddenly I couldn't tell him anything Larry Batzel had told me, or what had happened to Larry, or anything about it.

I finished my drink and stood up and put my coat back on. I said, "That's too much money for the job, General Winslow. We can talk about that later. Have I authority to represent you in my own way?"

He pressed a bell on his wheel chair. "Just tell him," he said. "I want to know he's all right and I want him to know I'm all right. That's all—unless he needs money.

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Now you'll have to excuse me. I'm tired."

He closed his eyes. I went back through the jungle and the butler met me at the door with my hat.

I breathed in some cool air and said, "The general wants me to see Mrs. O'Mara."

This room had a white carpet from wall to wall. Ivory drapes of immense height lay tumbled casually on the white carpet inside the many windows. The windows stared toward the dark foothills, and the air beyond the glass was dark too. It hadn't started to rain yet, but there was a feeling of pressure in the atmosphere.

Mrs. O'Mara was stretched out on a white chaise lounge with both her slippers off and her feet in the net stockings they don't wear any more. She was tall and dark, with a sulky mouth. Handsome, but this side of beautiful.

She said, "What in the world can *I* do for you? It's all known. Too damn known. Except that I don't know you, do I?"

"Well, hardly," I said. "I'm just a private copper in a small way of business."

She reached for a glass I hadn't noticed but would have looked for in a moment, on account of her way of talking and the fact she had her slippers off. She drank languidly, flashing a ring.

"I met him in a speakeasy," she said with a sharp laugh. "A very handsome bootlegger, with thick curly hair and an Irish grin. So I married him. Out of boredom. As for him, the bootlegging business was even then uncertain—if there were no other attractions."

She waited for me to say there were, but not as if she cared a lot whether I came through. I just said, "You didn't see him leave on the day he disappeared?"

"No. I seldom saw him leave, or come back. It was like that." She drank some more of her drink.

"Huh," I grunted. "But, of course, you didn't quarrel." They never do.

"There are so many ways of quarreling, Mr. Carmady."

"Yeah. I like your saying that. Of course you knew about the girl."

"I'm glad I'm being properly frank to an old family detective. Yes, I knew about the girl." She curled a tendril of inky hair behind her ear.

"Did you know about her before he disappeared?" I asked politely.

"Certainly."

"How?"

"You're pretty direct, aren't you? Connections, as they say. I'm an old speak fancier. Or didn't you know that?"

"Did you know the bunch at the Dardanella?"

"I've been there." She didn't look startled, or even surprised. "In fact, I practically lived there for a week. That's where I met Dudley O'Mara."

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"Yeah. Your father married pretty late in life, didn't he?"

I watched color fade in her cheeks. I wanted her mad, but there was nothing doing. She smiled and the color came back and she rang a push bell on a cord down in the swansdown cushions of the chaise lounge.

"Very late," she said, "if it's any of your business."

"It's not," I said.

A coy-looking maid came in and mixed a couple of drinks at a side table. She gave one to Mrs. O'Mara, put one down beside me. She went away again, showing a nice pair of legs under a short skirt.

Mrs. O'Mara watched the door shut and then said, "The whole thing has got Father into a mood. I wish Dud would wire or write or something."

I said slowly, "He's an old, old man, crippled, half buried already. One thin thread of interest held him to life. The thread snapped and nobody gives a damn. He tries to act as if he didn't give a damn himself. I don't call that a mood. I call that a pretty swell display of intestinal fortitude."

"Gallant," she said, and her eyes were daggers. "But you haven't touched your drink."

"I have to go," I said. "Thanks all the same."

She held a slim, tinted hand out and I went over and touched it. The thunder burst suddenly behind the hills and she jumped. A gust of air shook the windows.

I went down a tiled staircase to the hallway and the butler appeared out of a shadow and opened the door for me.

I looked down a succession of terraces decorated with flowerbeds and imported trees. At the bottom a high metal railing with gilded spearheads and a six-foot hedge inside. A sunken driveway crawled down to the main gates and a lodge inside them.

Beyond the estate the hill sloped down to the city and the old oil wells of La Brea, now partly a park, partly a deserted stretch of fenced-in wild land. Some of the wooden derricks still stood. These had made the wealth of the Winslow family and then the family had run away from them up the hill, far enough to get away from the smell of the sumps, not too far for them to look out of the front windows and see what made them rich.

I walked down brick steps between the terraced lawns. On one of them a dark-haired, pale-faced kid of ten or eleven was throwing darts at a target hung on a tree. I went along near him.

"You young O'Mara?" I asked.

He leaned against a stone bench with four darts in his hand and looked at me with cold, slaty eyes, old eyes.

"I'm Dade Winslow Trevillyan," he said grimly.

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"Oh, then Dudley O'Mara's not your dad."

"Of course not." His voice was full of scorn. "Who are you?"

"I'm a detective. I'm going to find your —I mean, Mr. O'Mara."

That didn't bring us any closer. Detectives were nothing to him. The thunder was tumbling about in the hills like a bunch of elephants playing tag. I had another idea.

"Bet you can't put four out of five into the gold at thirty feet."

He livened up. "With these?"

"Uh-huh."

"How much you bet?" he snapped.

"Oh, a dollar."

He ran to the target and cleaned darts off it, came back, and took a stance by the bench.

"That's not thirty feet," I said.

He gave me a sour look and went a few feet behind the bench. I grinned, then I stopped grinning.

His small hand darted so swiftly I could hardly follow it. Five darts hung in the gold center of the target in less than that many seconds. He stared at me triumphantly.

"Gosh, you're pretty good, Master Trevillyan," I grunted, and got my dollar out.

His small hand snapped at it like a trout taking the fly. He had it out of sight like a flash.

"That's nothing," he chuckled. "You ought to see me on our target range back of the garages. Want to go over there and bet some more?"

I looked back up the hill and saw part of a low white building backed up to a bank.

"Well, not today," I said. "Next time I visit here maybe. So Dud O'Mara is not your dad. If I find him anyway, will it be all right with you?"

He shrugged his thin, sharp shoulders in a maroon sweater. "Sure. But what can you do the police can't do?"

"It's a thought," I said, and left him.

I went on down the brick walk to the bottom of the lawns and along inside the hedge toward the gatehouse. I could see glimpses of the street through the hedge. When I was halfway to the lodge I saw the blue sedan outside. It was a small neat car, low-slung, very clean, lighter than a police car, but about the same size. Over beyond it I could see my roadster waiting under the pepper tree.

I stood looking at the sedan through the hedge. I could see the drift of somebody's cigarette smoke against the windshield inside the car. I turned my back to the lodge and looked up the hill. The Trevillyan kid had gone somewhere out of sight, to salt his dollar down maybe, though a dollar shouldn't have meant much to him.

I bent over and unsheathed the 7.65 Luger I was wearing that day and stuck it nose-down inside my left sock, inside my shoe. I could walk that way, if I didn't walk too fast. I went on to the gates.

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They kept them locked and nobody got in without identification from the house. The lodgekeeper, a big husky with a gun under his arm, came out and let me through a small postern at the side of the gates. I stood talking to him through the bars for a minute, watching the sedan.

It looked all right. There seemed to be two men in it. It was about a hundred feet along in the shadow of the high wall on the other side. It was a very narrow street, without sidewalks. I didn't have far to go to my roadster.

I walked a little stiffly across the dark pavement and got in, grabbed quickly down into a small compartment in the front part of the seat where I kept a spare gun. It was a police Colt. I slid it inside my under-arm holster and started the car.

I eased the brake off and pulled away. Suddenly the rain let go in big splashing drops and the sky was as black as Carrie Nation's bonnet. Not so black but that I saw the sedan wheel away from the curb behind me.

I started the windshield wiper and built up to forty miles an hour in a hurry. I had gone about eight blocks when they gave me the siren. That fooled me. It was a quiet street, deadly quiet. I slowed down and pulled over to the curb. The sedan slid up beside me and I was looking at the black snout of a submachine gun over the sill of the rear door.

Behind it a narrow face with reddened eyes, a fixed mouth. A voice above the sound of the rain and the windshield wiper and the noise of the two motors said, "Get in here with us. Be nice, if you know what I mean."

They were not cops. It didn't matter now. I shut off the ignition, dropped my car keys on the floor, and got out. The man behind the wheel of the sedan didn't look at me. The one behind kicked a door open and slid away along the seat, holding the tommygun nicely.

I got into the sedan.

"Okay, Louis. The frisk."

The driver came out from under his wheel and got behind me. He got the Colt from under my arm, tapped my hips and pockets, my belt line.

"Clean," he said, and got back into the front of the car.

The man with the tommy reached forward with his left hand and took my Colt from the driver, then lowered the tommy to the floor of the car and draped a brown rug over it. He leaned back in the corner again, smooth and relaxed, holding the Colt on his knee.

"Okay, Louie. Now let's ride."

We rode—idly, gently, the rain drumming on the roof and streaming down the windows on one side. We wound along curving hill streets, among estates that covered acres, whose houses were distant

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clusters of wet gables beyond blurred trees.

A tang of cigarette smoke floated under my nose and the red-eyed man said, "What did he tell you?"

"Little enough," I said. "That Mona blew town the night the papers got it. Old Winslow knew it already."

"He wouldn't have to dig very deep for that," Red-eyes said. "The buttons didn't. What else?"

"He said he's been shot at. He wanted me to ride him out of town. At the last moment he ran off alone. I don't know why."

"Loosen up, peeper," Red-eyes said dryly. "It's your only way out."

"That's all there is," I said, and looked out of the window at the driving rain.

"You on the case for the old guy?"

"No. He's tight."

Red-eyes laughed. The gun in my shoe felt heavy and unsteady, and very far away. I said, "That might be all there is to know about O'Mara."

The man in the front seat turned his head a little and growled, "Where the hell did you say that street was?"

"Top of Beverly Glen, stupid. Mulholland Drive."

"Oh, that. Jeeze, that ain't paved worth a damn."

"We'll pave it with the peeper," Red-eyes said.

The estates thinned out and scrub oak took possession of the hillsides.

"You ain't a bad guy," Red-eyes said. "You're just tight, like the old man. Don't you get the idea? We want to know *everything* he said, so we'll know whether we got to blot you or no."

"Go to hell," I said. "You wouldn't believe me anyway."

"Try us. This is just a job to us. We just do it and pass on."

"It must be nice work," I said. "While it lasts."

"You'll crack wise once too often, guy."

"I did—long ago, while you were still in Reform School. I'm still getting myself disliked."

Red-eyes laughed again. There seemed to be very little bluster about him.

"Far as we know you're clean with the law. Didn't make no cracks this morning. That right?"

"If I say yes, you can blot me right now. Okay."

"How about a grand pin money and forget the whole thing?"

"You wouldn't believe that either."

"Yeah, we would. Here's the idea. We do the job and pass on. We're an organization. But you live here, you got good will and a business. You'd play ball."

"Sure," I said. "I'd play ball."

"We don't," Red-eyes said softly, "never knock off a legit. Bad for the trade."

He leaned back in the corner, the

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gun on his right knee, and reached into an inner pocket. He spread a large tan wallet on his knee and fished two bills out of it, slid them folded along the seat. The wallet went back into his pocket.

"Yours," he said gravely. "You won't last twenty-four hours if you rip your cable."

I picked the bills up. Two five hundreds. I tucked them in my vest. "Right," I said. "I wouldn't be a legit any more then, would I?"

"Think that over dick."

We grinned at each other, a couple of nice lads getting along in a harsh, unfriendly world. Then Red-eyes turned his head sharply.

"Okay, Louie. Forget the Mulholland stuff. Pull up."

The car was halfway up a long bleak twist of hill. The rains drove in gray curtains down the slope. There was no ceiling, no horizon. I could see a quarter of a mile and I could see nothing outside our car that lived.

The driver edged over to the side of the bank and shut his motor off. He lit a cigarette and draped an arm on the back seat.

He smiled at me. He had a nice smile—like an alligator.

"We'll have a drink on it," Red-eyes said. "I wish I could make me a grand that easy. Just tyin' my nose to my chin."

"You ain't got no chin," Louie said, and went on smiling.

Red-eyes put the Colt down on the seat and drew a flat half-pint out of his side pocket. It looked like good stuff, green stamp, bottled in bond. He unscrewed the top with his teeth, sniffed at the liquor, and smacked his lips.

"No Crow McGee in this," he said. "This is the company spread. Tilt her."

He reached along the seat and gave me the bottle. I could have had his wrist, but there was Louie, and I was too far from my ankle.

I breathed shallowly from the top of my lungs and held the bottle near my lips, sniffed carefully. Behind the charred smell of the bourbon there was something else, very faint, a fruity odor that would have meant nothing to me in another place.

Suddenly and for no reason at all I remembered something Larry Batzel had said, something like: "East of Realito, towards the mountains, near the old cyanide plant." Cyanide. That was the word.

There was a swift tightness in my temples as I put the bottle to my mouth. I could feel my skin crawling, and the air was suddenly cold on it. I held the bottle high up around the liquor level and took a long gurgling drag at it. Very hearty and relaxing. About half a teaspoonful went into my mouth and none of that stayed there.

I coughed sharply and lurched forward gagging. Red-eyes laughed.

"Don't say you're sick from just one drink, pal."

I dropped the bottle and sagged

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far down in the seat, gagging violently. My legs slid way to the left, the left one underneath. I sprawled down on top of them, my arms limp. I had the gun.

I shot him under my left arm, almost without looking. He never touched the Colt except to knock it off the seat. The one shot was enough. I heard him lurch. I snapped a shot upward toward where Louie would be.

Louie wasn't there. He was down behind the front seat. He was silent. The whole car, the whole landscape was silent. Even the rain seemed for a moment to be utterly silent rain.

I still didn't have time to look at Red-eyes, but he wasn't doing anything. I dropped the Luger and yanked the tommygun out from under the rug, got my left hand on the front grip, got it set against my shoulder low down. Louie hadn't made a sound.

"Listen, Louie," I said softly, "I've got the stutter gun. How's about it?"

A shot came through the seat, a shot that Louie knew wasn't going to do any good. It starred a frame of unbreakable glass. There was more silence.

Then Louie said thickly, "I got a pineapple here. Want it?"

"Pull the pin and hold it," I said. "It will take care of both of us."

"Hell!" Louie said violently. "Is he croaked? I ain't got no pineapple."

I looked at Red-eyes then. He looked very comfortable in the corner of the seat, leaning back. He seemed to have three eyes, one of them redder even than the other two. For under-arm shooting that was something to be almost bashful about. It was too good.

"Yeah, Louie, he's croaked," I said. "How do we get together?"

I could hear his hard breathing now, and the rain had stopped being silent.

"Get out of the heap," he growled. "I'll blow."

"You get out, Louie. I'll blow."

"Jeeze, I can't walk home from here, pal."

"You won't have to, Louie. I'll send a car for you."

"Jeeze, I ain't done nothing. All I done was drive."

"Then reckless driving will be the charge, Louie. You can fix that—you and your organization. Get out before I uncork this popgun."

A door latch clicked and feet thumped on the roadway. I straightened up suddenly with the chopper. Louie was in the road in the rain, his hands empty and the alligator smile still on his face.

I got out past the dead man's neatly shod feet, got my Colt and the Luger off the floor, laid the heavy twelve-pound tommygun back on the car floor. I got handcuffs off my hip, motioned to Louie. He turned around sulkily and put his hands behind him.

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"You got nothing on me," he complained. "I got protection."

I clicked the cuffs on him and went over him for guns, much more carefully than he had gone over me. He had one besides the one he had left in the car.

I dragged Red-eyes out of the car and let him arrange himself on the wet roadway. He began to bleed again, but he was quite dead.

Louie eyed him bitterly. "He was a smart guy," he said. "Different. He liked tricks. Hello, smart guy."

I got my handcuff key out and unlocked one cuff, dragged it down, and locked it to the dead man's lifted wrist.

Louie's eyes got round and horrified and at last his smile went away.

"Jeeze," he whined. "Holy—! Jeeze. You ain't going to leave me like this, pal?"

"Goodbye, Louie," I said. "That was a friend of mine you cut down this morning."

"Holy—!" Louie whined.

I got into the sedan and started it, drove on to a place where I could turn, drove back down the hill past him. He stood stiffly as a scorched tree, his face as white as snow, with the dead man at his feet, one linked hand reaching up to Louie's hand. There was the horror of a thousand nightmares in his eyes.

I left him there in the rain.

It was getting dark early. I left the sedan a couple of blocks from my own car and locked it up, put the keys in the oil strainer. I walked back to my roadster and drove downtown.

I called the homicide detail from a phone booth, asked for a man named Grinnell, told him quickly what had happened and where to find Louie and the sedan. I told him I thought they were the thugs that machine-gunned Larry Batzel. I didn't tell him anything about Dud O'Mara.

"Nice work," Grinnell said in a queer voice. "But you better come in fast. There's a tag out for you, account of what some milk driver phoned in an hour ago."

"I'm all in," I said. "I've got to eat. Keep me off the air and I'll come in after a while."

"You better come in, boy. I'm sorry, but you better."

"Well, okay," I said.

I hung up and left the neighborhood without hanging around. I had to break it now. I had to, or get broken myself.

I had a meal down near the Plaza and started for Realito.

At about eight o'clock two yellow vapor lamps glowed high up in the rain and a dim stencil sign strung across the highway read: *Welcome to Realito.*

Frame houses on the main street, a sudden knot of stores, the lights of the corner drug store behind fogged glass, a flying-cluster of cars in front of a tiny movie palace, and a dark bank on another corner

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with a knot of men standing in front of it in the rain.

That was Realito. I went on. Empty fields closed in again.

This was past the orange country; nothing but the empty fields and the crouched foothills, and the rain.

It was a smart mile, more like three, before I spotted a side road and a faint light on it, as if from behind drawn blinds in a house. Just at that moment my left front tire let go with an angry hiss. That was cute. Then the right rear let go the same way.

I stopped almost exactly at the intersection. Very cute indeed. I got out, turned my raincoat up a little higher, unshipped a flash, and looked at a flock of heavy galvanized tacks with heads as big as dimes. The flat shiny butt of one of them blinked at me from my tire.

Two flats and one spare. I tucked my chin down and started toward the faint light up the side road.

It was the place all right. The light came from the tilted skylight on the garage roof. Big double doors in front were shut tight, but light showed at the cracks, strong white light. I tossed the beam of the flash up and read: *Art Huck—Auto Repairs and Refinishing.*

Beyond the garage a house sat back from the muddy road behind a thin clump of trees. That had light too. I saw a small buttoned-up coupe in front of the wooden porch.

The first thing was the tires, if it could be worked, and they didn't know me. It was a wet night for walking.

I snapped the flash out and rapped on the doors with it. The light inside went out. I stood there licking rain off my upper lip, the flash in my left hand, my right inside my coat. I had the Luger back under my arm again.

A voice spoke through the door, and didn't sound pleased.

"What you want? Who are you?"

"Open up," I said. "I've got two flat tires on the highway and only one spare. I need help."

"We're closed up, mister. Realito's a mile west of here."

I started to kick the door. There was swearing inside, then another, much softer voice.

"A wise guy, huh? Open up, Art."

A bolt squealed and half of the door sagged inward. I snapped the flash again and it hit a gaunt face. Then an arm swept and knocked it out of my hand. A gun had just peeked at me from the flailing hand.

I dropped low, felt around for the flash, and was still. I just didn't pull a gun.

"Kill the spot, mister. Guys get hurt that way."

The flash was burning down in the mud. I snapped it off, stood up with it. Light went on inside the garage, outlined a tall man in cov-

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eralls. He backed inward and his gun held on me.

"Come on in and shut the door."

I did that. "Tacks all over the end of your street," I said. "I thought you wanted the business."

"Ain't you got any sense? A bank job was pulled at Realito this afternoon."

"I'm a stranger here," I said, remembering the knot of men in front of the bank in the rain.

"Okay, okay. Well, there was and the punks are hid out somewhere in the hills, they say. You stepped on their tacks, huh?"

"So it seems." I looked at the other man in the garage.

He was short, heavy-set, with a cool brown face and cool brown eyes. He wore a belted raincoat of brown leather. His brown hat had the usual rakish tilt and was dry. His hands were in his pockets and he looked bored.

There was a hot sweetish smell of pyroxylin paint on the air. A big sedan over in the corner had a paint gun lying on its fender. It was a Buick, almost new. It didn't need the paint it was getting.

The man in coveralls tucked his gun out of sight through a flap in the side of his clothes. He looked at the brown man. The brown man looked at me and said gently, "Where you from, stranger?"

"Seattle," I said.

"Going west—to the big city?" He had a soft voice, soft and dry, like the rustle of well-worn leather.

"Yes. How far is it?"

"About forty miles. Seems farther in this weather. Come the long way, didn't you? By Tahoe and Lone Pine?"

"Not Tahoe," I said. "Reno and Carson City."

"Still the long way." A fleeting smile touched the brown lips.

"Take a jack and get his flats, Art."

"Now, listen, Lash—" the man in the coveralls growled, and stopped as though his throat had been cut from ear to ear.

I could have sworn that he shivered. There was dead silence. The brown man didn't move a muscle. Something looked out of his eyes, and then his eyes lowered, almost shyly. His voice was the same soft, dry rustle of sound.

"Take two jacks, Art. He's got two flats."

The gaunt man swallowed. Then he went over to a corner and put a coat on, and a cap. He grabbed up a socket wrench and a handjack and wheeled a dolly jack over to the doors.

"Back on the highway, is it?" he asked me almost tenderly.

"Yeah. You can use the spare for one spot, if you're busy," I said.

"He's not busy," the brown man said and looked at his fingernails.

Art went out with his tools. The door shut again. I looked at the Buick. I didn't look at Lash Yeager. I knew it was Lash Yeager. There

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wouldn't be two men called Lash that came to that garage. I didn't look at him because I would be looking across the sprawled body of Larry Batzel, and it would show in my face. For a moment, anyway.

He glanced toward the Buick himself. "Just a panel job to start with," he drawled. "But the guy that owns it has dough and his driver needed a few bucks. You know the racket."

"Sure," I said.

The minutes passed on tiptoe. Long, sluggish minutes. Then feet crunched outside and the door was pushed open. The light hit pencils of rain and made silver wires of them.

Art trundled two muddy flats in sulkily, kicked the door shut, let one of the flats fall on its side. The rain and fresh air had given him his nerve back. He looked at me savagely.

"Seattle," he snarled. "Seattle, my eye!"

The brown man lit a cigarette as if he hadn't heard. Art peeled his coat off and yanked my tire up on a rim spreader, tore it loose viciously, had the tube out and cold-patched in nothing flat. He strode scowling over to the wall near me and grabbed an air hose, let enough air into the tube to give it body, and hefted it in both hands to dip it in a washtub of water.

I was a sap, but their teamwork was very good. Neither had looked at the other since Art came back with my tires.

Art tossed the air-stiffened tube up casually, caught it with both hands wide, looked it over sourly beside the washtub of water, took one short easy step, and slammed it down over my head and shoulders.

He jumped behind me in a flash, leaned his weight down on the rubber, dragged it tight against my chest and arms. I could move my hands, but I couldn't get near my gun.

The brown man brought his right hand out of his pocket and tossed a wrapped cylinder of nickels up and down on his palm as he stepped lithely across the floor.

I heaved back hard, then suddenly threw all my weight forward. Just as suddenly Art let go of the tube, and kneed me from behind.

I sprawled, but I never knew when I reached the floor. The fist with the weighted tube of nickels met me in mid-flight. Perfectly timed, perfectly weighted, and with my own weight to help it out.

I went out like a puff of dust in a draft.

It seemed there was a woman and she was sitting beside a lamp. Light shone on my face, so I shut my eyes again and tried to look at her through my eyelashes. She was so platinumed that her head shone like a silver fruit bowl.

She wore a green traveling dress

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with a mannish cut to it and a broad white collar falling over the lapels. A sharp-angled glossy bag stood at her feet. She was smoking, and a drink was tall and pale at her elbow.

I opened my eyes wider and said, "Hello there."

Her eyes were the eyes I remembered, outside Sardi's in a second-hand Rolls-Royce. Very blue eyes, very soft and lovely. Not the eyes of a hustler around the fast money boys.

"How do you feel?" Her voice was soft and lovely too.

"Great," I said. "Except somebody built a filling station on my jaw."

"What did you expect, Mr. Carmady? Orchids?"

"So you know my name."

"You slept well. They had plenty of time to go through your pockets. They did everything but embalm you."

"Right," I said.

I could move a little, not very much. My wrists were behind my back, handcuffed. There was a little poetic justice in that. From the cuffs a cord ran to my ankles, and tied them, and then dropped down out of sight over the end of the davenport and was tied somewhere else. I was almost as helpless as if I had been screwed up in a coffin.

"What time is it?"

She looked sideways down at her wrist, beyond the spiral of her cigarette smoke.

"Ten seventeen. Got a date?"

"Is this the house next the garage? Where are the boys—digging a grave?"

"You wouldn't care, Carmady. They'll be back."

"Unless you have the key to these bracelets you might spare me a little of that drink."

She rose all in one piece and came over to me, with the tall amber glass in her hand. She bent over me. Her breath was delicate. I gulped from the glass craning my neck up.

"I hope they don't hurt you," she said distantly, stepping back. "I hate killing."

"And you Joe Mesarvey's wife. Shame on you. Gimme some more of the hooch."

She gave me some more. Blood began to move in my stiffened body.

"I kind of like you," she said. "Even if your face does look like a collision mat."

"Make the most of it," I said. "It won't last long even this good."

She looked around swiftly and seemed to listen. One of the two doors was ajar. She looked toward that. Her face seemed pale. But the sounds were only the rain.

She sat down by the lamp again.

"Why did you come here and stick your neck out?" she asked slowly, looking at the floor.

The carpet was made of red and tan squares. There were bright green pine trees on the wallpaper and the curtains were blue. The

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furniture, what I could see of it. looked as if it came from one of those places that advertise on bus benches.

"I had a rose for you," I said. "From Larry Batzel."

She lifted something off the table and twirled it slowly, the dwarf rose he had left for her.

"I got it," she said quietly. "There was a note, but they didn't show me that. Was it for me?"

"No, for me. He left it on my table before he went out and got shot."

Her face fell apart like something you see in a nightmare. Her mouth and eyes were black hollows. She didn't make a sound. And after a moment her face settled back into the same calmly beautiful lines.

"They didn't tell me that either," she said softly.

"He got shot," I said carefully, "because he found out what Joe and Lash Yeager did to Dud O'Mara. Bumped him off."

That one didn't faze her at all. "Joe didn't do anything to Dud O'Mara," she said quietly. "I haven't seen Dud in two years. That was just newspaper hooey, about me seeing him."

"It wasn't in the papers," I said.

"Well, it was hooey wherever it was. Joe is in Chicago. He went yesterday by plane to sell out. If the deal goes through, Lash and I are to follow him. Joe is no killer."

I stared at her.

Her eyes got haunted again. "Is Larry—is he—?"

"He's dead," I said. "It was a professional job, with a tommygun. I didn't mean they did it personally."

She took hold of her lip and held it for a moment tight between her teeth. I could hear her slow, hard breathing. She jammed her cigarette in an ashtray and stood up.

"Joe didn't do it!" she stormed. "I know damn well he didn't. He —"

She stopped cold, glared at me, touched her hair, then suddenly yanked it off. It was a wig. Underneath, her own hair was short like a boy's, and streaked yellow and whitish brown, with darker tints at the roots. It couldn't make her ugly.

I managed a sort of laugh. "You just came out here to molt, didn't you, Silver-Wig? And I thought they were hiding you out—so it would look as if you had skipped with Dud O'Mara."

She kept on staring at me. As if she hadn't heard a word I said. Then she strode over to a wall mirror and put the wig back on, straightened it, turned and faced me.

"Joe didn't kill anybody," she said again, in a low, tight voice. "He's a heel—but not that kind of heel. He doesn't know anything more about where Dud O'Mara went than I do. And I don't know anything."

"He just got tired of the rich lady and scrammed," I said dully.

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She stood near me now, her white fingers at her sides, shining in the lamplight. Her head above me was almost in shadow. The rain drummed and my jaw felt large and hot and the nerve along the jawbone ached, ached.

"Lash has the only car that was here," she said softly. "Can you walk to Realito, if I cut the ropes?"

"Sure. Then what?"

"I've never been mixed up in a murder. I won't now. I won't ever."

She went out of the room very quickly, and came back with a long kitchen knife and sawed the cord that tied my ankles, pulled it off, cut the place where it was tied to the handcuffs. She stopped once to listen, but it was just the rain again.

I rolled up to a sitting position and stood up. My feet were numb, but that would pass. I could walk. I could run, if I had to.

"Lash has the key to the cuffs," she said dully.

"Let's go," I said. "Got a gun?"

"No. I'm not going. You beat it. He may be back any minute. They were just moving stuff out of the garage."

I went over close to her. "You're going to stay here after turning me loose? Wait for that killer? You're nuts. Come on, Silver-Wig, you're going with me."

"No."

"Suppose," I said, "he did kill O'Mara? Then he also killed Larry. It's got to be that way."

"Joe never killed anybody," she almost snarled at me.

"Well, suppose Yeager did."

"You're lying, Carmady. Just to scare me. Get out. I'm not afraid of Lash Yeager. I'm his boss's wife."

"Joe Mesarvey is a handful of mush," I snarled back. "The only time a girl like you goes for a wrong gee is when he's a handful of mush. Let's drift."

"Get out!" she said hoarsely.

"Okay." I turned away from her and went through the door.

She almost ran past me into the hallway and opened the front door, looked out into the black wetness. She motioned me forward.

"Goodbye," she whispered. "I hope you find Dud. I hope you find who killed Larry. But it wasn't Joe."

I stepped close to her, almost pushed her against the wall with my body.

"You're still crazy, Silver-Wig. Goodbye."

She raised her hands quickly and put them on my face. Cold hands, icy cold. She kissed me swiftly on the mouth with cold lips.

"Beat it, strong guy. I'll be seeing you some more. Maybe in heaven."

I went through the door and down the dark slithery wooden steps of the porch, across gravel to the round grass plot and the clump of thin trees. I came past them to the roadway, went back along it toward Foothill Boulevard. The rain touched my face with fingers

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of ice that were no colder than her fingers.

The curtained roadster stood just where I had left it, leaned over, the left front axle on the tarred shoulder of the highway. My spare and one stripped rim were thrown in the ditch.

They had probably searched it, but I still hoped. I crawled in backward and banged my head on the steering post and rolled over to get the manacled hands into my little secret gun pocket. They touched the barrel. It was still there.

I got it out, got myself out of the car, got hold of the gun by the right end and looked it over.

I held it tight against my back to protect it a little from the rain and started back toward the house.

I was halfway there when he came back. His lights turning quickly off the highway almost caught me. I flopped into the ditch and put my nose in the mud and prayed.

The car hummed past. I heard the wet rasp of its tires shouldering the gravel in front of the house. The motor died and lights went off. The door slammed. I didn't hear the house door shut, but I caught a feeble fringe of light through the trees as it opened.

I got up on my feet and went on. I came up beside the car, a small coupe, rather old. The gun was down at my side, pulled around my hip as far as the cuffs would let it come.

The coupe was empty. Water gurgled in the radiator. I listened and heard nothing from the house. No loud voices, no quarrel. Only the heavy bong-bong-bong of the raindrops hitting the elbows at the bottom of rain gutters.

Yeager was in the house. She had let me go and Yeager was in there with her. Probably she wouldn't tell him anything. She would just stand and look at him. She was his boss's wife. That would scare Yeager to death.

He wouldn't stay long, but he wouldn't leave her behind, alive or dead. He would be on his way and take her with him. What happened to her later on was something else.

All I had to do was wait for him to come out. I didn't do it.

I shifted the gun into my left hand and leaned down to scoop up some gravel. I threw it against the front window. It was a weak effort. Very little even reached the glass.

I ran back behind the coupe and got its door open and saw the keys in the ignition lock. I crouched down, holding on to the door post.

The house had already gone dark, but that was all. There wasn't any sound from it. No soap. Yeager was too cagey.

I reached in with my foot and found the starter, then strained back with one hand and turned the ignition key. The warm motor

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caught at once, throbbed gently against the pounding rain.

I got back to the ground and and slid along to the rear of the car, crouched down.

The sound of the motor got him. He couldn't be left there without car.

darkened window slid up an inch, only some shifting of light on the glass showing it moved. Flame spouted from it, the racket of three quick shots. Glass broke in the coupe.

I screamed and let the scream die into a gurgling groan. I was getting good at that sort of thing. I let the groan die in a choked gasp. I was through, finished. He had got me. Nice shooting, Yeager.

Inside the house a man laughed. Then silence again, except for the rain and the quietly throbbing motor of the coupe.

Then the house door inched open. A figure showed in it. She came out on the porch, stiffly, the white showing at her collar, the wig showing a little but not so much. She came down the steps like a wooden woman. I saw Yeager behind her.

She started across the gravel. Her voice said slowly, without any tone at all, "I can't see a thing, Lash. The windows are all misted."

She jerked a little, as if a gun had prodded her, and came on. Yeager didn't speak. I could see him now past her shoulder, his hat, part of his face. But no kind of a shot for a man with cuffs on his wrists.

She stopped again, and her voice was suddenly horrified.

"He's behind the wheel!" she yelled. "Slumped over!"

He fell for it. He knocked her to one side and started to blast again. More glass jumped around. A bullet hit a tree on my side of the car. A cricket whined somewhere. The motor kept right on humming.

He was low, crouched against the black, his face a grayness without form that seemed to come back very slowly after the glare of the shots. His own fire had blinded him too—for a second. That was enough.

I shot him four times, straining the pulsing Colt against my ribs.

He tried to turn and the gun slipped away from his hand. He half snatched for it in the air, before both his hands suddenly went against his stomach and stayed there. He sat down on the wet gravel and his harsh panting dominated every other sound of the wet night.

I watched him lie down on his side, very slowly, without taking his hands away from his stomach. The panting stopped.

It seemed like an age before Silver-Wig called out to me. Then she was beside me, grabbing my arm.

"Shut the motor off!" I yelled at her. "And get the key of these damn irons out of his pocket."

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"You d-darn fool," she babbled. "W-what did you come back for?"

Captain Al Roof of the Missing Persons Bureau swung in his chair and looked at the sunny window. This was another day, and the rain had stopped long since.

He said gruffly, "You're making a lot of mistakes, brother. Dud O'Mara just pulled down the curtain. None of those people knocked him off. The Batzel killing had nothing to do with it. They've got Mesarvey in Chicago and he looks clean. The lug you anchored to the dead guy don't even know who they were pulling the job for. Our boys asked him enough to be sure of that."

"I'll bet they did," I said. "I've been in the same bucket all night and I couldn't tell them much either."

He looked at me slowly, with large, bleak, tired eyes. "Killing Yeager was all right, I guess. And the chopper. In the circumstances. Besides, I'm not homicide. I couldn't link any of that to O'Mara—unless you could."

I could, but I hadn't. Not yet. "No," I said. "I guess not."

I stuffed and lit my pipe. After a sleepless night it tasted better.

"That's all that's worrying you?"

"I wondered why you didn't find the girl, at Realito. It couldn't have been very hard—for you."

"We just didn't. We should have. I admit it. We didn't. Anything else?"

I blew smoke across his desk. "I'm looking for O'Mara because the general told me to. It wasn't any use my telling him you would do everything that could be done. He could afford a man with all [redacted] time on it. I suppose you re[redacted] that."

He wasn't amused. "Not at all, if he wants to waste money. The people that resent you are behind a door marked Homicide Bureau."

He planted his feet with a slap and elbowed his desk.

"O'Mara had fifteen grand in his clothes. That's a lot of jack, but O'Mara would be the boy to have it. So he could take it out and have his old pals see him with it. Only they wouldn't think it was fifteen grand of real dough. His wife says it was. Now with any other guy but an ex-legger in the gravy that might indicate an intention to disappear. But not O'Mara. He packed it all the time."

He bit a cigar and put a match to it. He waved a large finger, "See?"

I said I saw.

"Okay. O'Mara had fifteen grand, and a guy that pulls down the curtain can keep it down only so long as his wad lasts. Fifteen grand is a good wad. I might disappear myself, if I had that much. But after it's gone we get him. He cashes a check, lays down a marker, hits a hotel or store for credit, gives

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a reference, writes a letter or gets one. He's in a new town and he's got a new name, but he's got the same old appetite. He has to get back into the fiscal system one way or another. A guy can't have friends everywhere, and if he had, they wouldn't all stay clammed forever. Would they?"

"No, they wouldn't," I said.

"He went far," Roof said. "But the fifteen grand was all the preparation he made. No baggage, no boat or rail or plane reservation, no taxi or private rental hack to a point out of town. That's all checked. His own car was found a dozen blocks from where he lived. But that means nothing. He knew people who would ferry him several hundred miles and keep quiet about it, even in the face of a reward. Here, but not everywhere. Not new friends."

"But you'll get him," I said.

"When he gets hungry."

"That could take a year or two. General Winslow may not live a year. That is a matter of sentiment, not whether you have an open file when you retire."

"You attend to the sentiment, brother." His eyes moved and bushy reddish eyebrows moved with them. He didn't like me. Nobody did, in the police department, that day.

"I'd like to," I said and stood up. "Maybe I'd go pretty far to attend to that sentiment."

"Sure," Roof said, suddenly thoughtful. "Well, Winslow is a big man. Anything I can do let me know."

"You could find out who had Larry Batzel gunned," I said. "Even if there isn't any connection."

"We'll do that. Glad to," he guffawed and flicked ash over his desk. "You just knock off the guys who can talk and we'll do the rest. We like to work that way."

"It was self-defense," I growled. "I couldn't help myself."

"Sure. Take the air, brother. I'm busy."

But his large bleak eyes twinkled at me as I went out.

The morning was all blue and gold and the birds in the ornamental trees of the Winslow estate were crazy with song after the rain.

The gatekeeper let me in through the postern and I walked up the driveway and along the top terrace to the huge carved Italian front door. Before I rang the bell I looked down the hill and saw the Trevillyan kid sitting on his stone bench with his head cupped in his hands, staring at nothing.

I went down the brick path to him. "No darts today, son?"

He looked up at me with his lean, slaty, sunken eyes.

"No. Did you find him?"

"Your dad? No, sonny, not yet."

He jerked his head. His nostrils flared angrily. "He's not my dad I told you. And don't talk to me as if

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I were four years old. My dad he's —he's in Florida or somewhere."

"Well, I haven't found him yet, whoever's dad he is," I said.

"Who smacked your jaw?" he asked, staring at me.

"Oh, a fellow with a roll of nickels in his hand."

"Nickels?"

"Yeah. That's as good as brass knuckles. Try it sometime, but not on me." I grinned.

"You won't find him," he said bitterly, staring at my jaw. "Him, I mean. My mother's husband."

"I bet I do."

"How much you bet?"

"More money than even you've got in your pants."

He kicked viciously at the edge of a red brick in the walk. His voice was still sulky, but more smooth. His eyes speculated.

"Want to bet on something else? C'mon over to the range. I bet you a dollar I can knock down eight out of ten pipes in ten shots."

I looked back toward the house. Nobody seemed impatient to receive me.

"Well," I said, "we'll have to make it snappy. Let's go."

We went along the side of the house under the windows. The orchid greenhouse showed over the tops of some bushy trees far back. A man in neat whipcord was polishing the chromium on a big car in front of the garages. We went past there to the low white building against the bank.

The boy took a key out and unlocked the door and we went into close air that still held traces of cordite fumes. The boy clicked a spring lock on the door.

"Me first," he snapped.

The place looked something like a small beach shooting gallery. There was a counter with a .22 repeating rifle on it and a long, slim target pistol. Both well oiled but dusty. About thirty feet beyond the counter was a waist-high, solid-looking partition across the building, and behind that a simple layout of clay pipes and ducks and two round white targets marked off with black rings and stained by lead bullets.

The clay pipes ran in an even line across the middle, and there was a big skylight, and a row of hooded overhead lights.

The boy pulled a cord on the wall and a thick canvas blind slid across the skylight. He turned on the hooded lights and then the place really looked like a beach shooting gallery.

He picked up the .22 rifle and loaded it quickly from a cardboard box of shells, .22 shorts.

"A dollar I get eight out of ten pipes?"

"Blast away," I said, and put my money on the counter.

He took aim almost casually, fired too fast, showing off. He missed three pipes. It was pretty fancy shooting at that. He threw the rifle down on the counter.

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"Gee, go set up some more. Let's not count that one. I wasn't set."

"You don't aim to lose any money, do you, son? Go set 'em up yourself. It's your range."

His narrow face got angry and [redacted] voice got shrill. "You do it! I've [redacted]o relax, see. I've got to relax."

[redacted]hrugged at him, lifted a flap in [redacted]he counter, and went along the whitewashed side wall, squeezed past the end of the low partition. The boy clicked his reloaded rifle shut behind me.

"Put that down," I growled back at him. "Never touch a gun when there's anyone in front of you."

He put it down, looking hurt.

I bent down and grabbed a handful of clay pipes out of the sawdust in a big wooden box on the floor. I shook the yellow grains of wood off them and started to straighten up.

I stopped with my hat above the barrier, just the top of my hat. I never knew why I stopped. Blind instinct.

The .22 cracked and the lead bullet bonged into the target in front of my head. My hat stirred lazily on my head, as though a blackbird had swooped at it during the nesting season.

A nice kid. He was full of tricks, like Red-eyes. I dropped the pipes and took hold of my hat by the brim, lifted it straight up off my head a few inches. The gun cracked again. Another metallic bong on the target.

I let myself fall heavily to the wooden flooring, among the clay pipes.

A door opened and shut. That was all. Nothing else. The hard glare from the hooded lights beat down on me. The sun peeked in at the edges of the skylight blind. There were two bright new splashes on the nearest target, and there were four small round holes in my hat, two and two, on each side.

I crawled to the end of the barrier and peeked around it. The boy was gone. I could see the small muzzles of the two guns on the counter.

I stood up and went back along the wall, switched the lights off, turned the knob of the spring lock and went out. The Winslow chauffeur whistled at his polish job around in front of the garages.

I crushed my hat in my hand and went back along the side of the house, looking for the kid. I didn't see him. I rang the front doorbell.

I asked for Mrs. O'Mara. I didn't let the butler take my hat.

She was in an oyster-white something, with white fur at the cuffs and collar and around the bottom. A breakfast table on wheels was pushed to one side of her chair and she was flicking ashes among the silver.

The coy-looking maid with the nice legs came and took the table out and shut the tall white door. I sat down.

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Mrs. O'Mara leaned her head back against a cushion and looked tired. The line of her throat was distant, cold. She stared at me with a cool, hard look, in which there was plenty of dislike.

"You seemed rather human yesterday," she said. "But I see you are just a brute like the rest of them. Just a brutal cop."

"I came to ask you about Lash Yeager," I said.

She didn't even pretend to be amused. "And why should you think of asking me?"

"Well—if you lived a week at the Dardanella Club—" I waved my crunched-together hat.

She looked at her cigarette fixedly. "Well, I did meet him, I believe. I remember the rather unusual name."

"They all have names like that, those animals," I said. "It seems that Larry Batzel—I guess you read in your paper about him too—was a friend of Dud O'Mara's once. I didn't tell you about him yesterday. Maybe that was a mistake."

A pulse began to throb in her throat. She said softly, "I have a suspicion you are about to become very insolent, that I may even have to have you thrown out."

"Not before I've said my piece," I said. "It seems that Mr. Yeager's driver—they have drivers as well as unusual names, those animals—told Larry Batzel that Mr. Yeager was out this way the night O'Mara disappeared."

The old army blood had to be good for something in her. She didn't move a muscle. She just froze solid.

I got up and took the cigarette from between her frozen fingers and killed it in a white jade ash tray. I laid my hat carefully on white satin knee. I sat down a

Her eyes moved after a wh They moved down and looked at the hat. Her face flushed very slowly, in two vivid patches over the cheekbones. She fought around with her tongue and lips.

"I know," I said. "It's not much of a hat. I'm not making you a present of it. But just look at the bullet holes in it once."

Her hands became alive and snatched at the hat. Her eyes became flames.

She spread the crown out, looked at the holes, and shuddered.

"Yeager?" she asked, very faintly. It was a wisp of a voice, an old voice.

I said very slowly, "Yeager wouldn't use a .22 target rifle, Mrs. O'Mara."

The flame died in her eyes. They were pools of darkness, much emptier than darkness.

"You're his mother," I said. "What do you want to do about it?"

"Merciful God! Dade! He . . . shot at you!"

"Twice," I said.

"But why? . . . Oh, why?"

"You think I'm a wise guy, Mrs.

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O'Mara. Just another hard-eyed boy from the other side of the tracks. It would be easy in this spot, if I was. But I'm not that at all, really. Do I have to tell why he shot at me!"

She didn't speak. She nodded slowly. Her face was a mask now.

"I'd say he probably can't help it," I said. "He didn't want me to find his stepfather, for one thing. Then he's a little lad that likes money. That seems small, but it's part of the picture. He almost lost a dollar on me on his shooting. It seems small, but he lives in a small world. Most of all, of course, he's a crazy little sadist with an itchy trigger finger."

"How dare you!" she flared. It didn't mean anything. She forgot it herself instantly.

"How dare I? I do dare. Let's not bother figuring why he shot at *me*. I'm not the first, am I? You wouldn't have known what I was talking about, you wouldn't have assumed he did it on purpose."

She didn't move or speak. I took a deep breath.

"So let's talk about why he shot Dud O'Mara," I said.

If I thought she would yell even this time, I fooled myself. The old man in the orchid house had put more into her than her tallness and her dark hair and her reckless eyes.

She pulled her lips back and tried to lick them, and it made her look like a scared little girl, for a second. The lines of her cheeks sharpened and her hand went up like an artificial hand moved by wires and took hold of the white fur at her throat and pulled it tight and squeezed it until her knuckles looked like bleached bone.

Then she just stared at me.

My hat slid off her knee onto the floor, without her moving. The sound it made falling was one of the loudest sounds I had ever heard.

"Money," she said in a dry croak. "Of course you want money."

"How much money do I want?"

"Fifteen thousand dollars."

I nodded, stiff-necked as a floorwalker trying to see with his back.

"That would be about right. That would be the established retainer. That would be about what he had in his pockets and what Yeager got for getting rid of him."

"You're too—damned smart," she said horribly. "I could kill you myself and like it."

I tried to grin. "That's right. Smart and without a feeling in the world. It happened something like this. The boy got O'Mara where he got me, by the same simple ruse. I don't think it was a plan. He hated his stepfather, but he wouldn't exactly plan to kill him."

"He hated him," she said.

"So they're in the little shooting gallery and O'Mara is dead on the floor, behind the barrier, out of sight. The shots, of course, meant nothing there. And very little blood, with a head shot, small caliber. So the boy goes out and locks the door and hides. But after a

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while he has to tell somebody. He has to. He tells you. You're his mother. You're the one to tell."

"Yes," she breathed. "He did just that." Her eyes had stopped hating me.

"You think about calling it an accident, which is okay, except for one thing. The boy's not a normal boy, and you know it. The general knows it, the servants know. There must be other people that know it. And the law, dumb as you think they are, are pretty smart with subnormal types. They get to handle so many of them. And I think he would have talked. I think, after a while, he would even have bragged."

"Go on," she said.

"You wouldn't risk that," I said. "Not for your son and not for the sick old man in the orchid house. You'd do any awful criminal callous thing rather than risk that. You did it. You knew Yeager and you hired him to get rid of the body. That's all—except that hiding the girl, Mona Mesarvey, helped to make it look like a deliberate disappearance."

"He took him away after dark, in Dud's own car," she said hollowly.

I reached down and picked my hat off the floor. "How about the servants?"

"Norris knows. The butler. He'd die on the rack before he told."

"Yeah. Now you know why Larry Batzel was knocked off and why I was taken for a ride, don't you?"

"Blackmail," she said. "It hadn't come yet, but I was waiting for it. I would have paid anything, and he would know that."

"Bit by bit, year by year, there was a quarter of a million in it for him, easy. I don't think Joe Mesarvey was in it at all. I know the girl wasn't."

She didn't say anything. She just kept her eyes on my face.

"Why in hell," I groaned, "didn't you take the guns away from him?"

"He's worse than you think. That would have started something worse. I'm—I'm almost afraid of him myself."

"Take him away," I said. "From here. From the old man. He's young enough to be cured, by the right handling. Take him to Europe. Far away. Take him now. It would kill the general to know his blood was in that."

She got up draggingly and dragged herself across to the windows. She stood motionless, almost blending into the heavy white drapes. Her hands hung at her sides, very motionless also.

After a while she turned and walked past me. When she was behind me she caught her breath and sobbed just once.

"It was very vile. It was the vilest thing I ever heard of. Yet I would do it again. Father would not have done it. He would have spoken

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right out. It would, as you say, have killed him."

"Take him away," I pounded on. "He's hiding out there now. He thinks he got me. He's hiding somewhere like an animal. Get him. He can't help it."

"I offered you money," she said, still behind me. "That's nasty. I wasn't in love with Dudley O'Mara. That's nasty too. I can't thank you. I don't know what to say."

"Forget it," I said. "I'm just an old workhorse. Put *your* work on the boy."

"I promise. Goodbye, Mr. Carmady."

We didn't shake hands. I went back down the stairs and the butler was at the front door as usual. Nothing in his face but politeness.

"You will not want to see the general today, sir?"

"Not today, Norris."

I didn't see the boy outside. I went through the postern and got into my rented Ford and drove on down the hill, past where the old oil wells were.

Around some of them, not visible from the street, there were still sumps in which waste water lay and festered with a scum of oil on top.

They would be ten or twelve feet deep, maybe more. There would be dark things in them. Perhaps in one of them—

I was glad I had killed Yeager.

On the way back downtown I stopped at a bar and had a couple of drinks. They didn't do me any good.

All they did was make me think of Silver-Wig, and I never saw her again.

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DON'T READ THIS STORY—*until after you've read Raymond Chandler's "The Curtain," also in this issue . . . Ron Goulart's "The Peppermint Striped Goodbye" is the Black Mask hard-boiled parody to end all Black Mask hard-boiled parodies . . .*

THE PEPPERMINT STRIPED GOODBYE

by RON GOULART

Chapter One

THE DRIVEIN, ALL HARSH GLASS AND stiff redwood and brittle aluminum and sharp No. 7 nails, stood on the oceanside of the bright road like some undecided suicide. My car hop had a look of frozen hopefulness and the flawed walk of a wind-up doll with a faulty gudgeon pin. Shifting in the seat of my late model car, I eased the barrel of my stiff black .38 Police Special so that it stopped cutting off the circulation in my left leg.

"Where's the town of San Mineo?" I asked the girl, my voice an echo of all the lost hopes of all of us.

"Back that way about twenty miles," she said.

I'd thought so. Sometimes the intricate labyrinth that is Southern California gets one up on me. But there is, as my once-wife used to point out, an intense, harsh, sun-dryed stubbornness about Ross Pewter. She often talked like that.

It was stubborn of me to drive my late model car, gunning it too much on the sharp death-edged curves of the road that wound by the sea, twenty miles in the wrong direction. I was thirty-six now and sometimes the harsh sun-dryed motor trips through the fever-heat madness that is Southern California made me feel that time's winged chariot was behind me. Other times it was a lettuce truck. Nobody passed Ross Pewter on the road.

"Do you wish to see a menu?" the car hop asked. Her voice had the ring of too much laughter deferred in it.

"No," I told her. I backed out of the place, afraid of the already ghost-town look of it, and cannoned back toward San Mineo and my client.

"Pewter," I said aloud as my late model car flashed like a dazed locust down the mirage of the state highway, "Pewter, some of these encounters you get into in the pursuit of a case seem to be without meaning."

I would have answered myself that life itself is at times, most times, meaningless. But a highway patrol cycle, its motor like the throaty cough of an old man who has come

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to Los Angeles from Ohio and found that his Social Security checks are being sent still to his Ohio address, started up behind me. The pursuit began and I had to ride the car hard to elude it.

Chapter Two

The pillars that held up the porch of the big house reminded me of the detail of the capital and entablature of the Ionic temple at Fortuna Virilis at Rome. The entablature, cornice, and architrave were encrusted with carved ornament, a motif of formalized acanthus leaf enriching the design, and the scrolls terminated in rosettes.

I almost wished this were the house I was going to visit.

Sighing, and dislodging the barrel of my pistol from a tender part of my thigh, I crossed the rich moneyed street and approached the home of old Tro Bultitude. Decay seemed to drift all around, carried like pollen on the hot red wind of this late Southern California afternoon. Even the pilasters, the balustrades, and the cornices of the sprawling Bultitude mansion seemed decayed. It sat like the waiting wedding cake in that book by Charles Dickens.

The thought of it all filled me with a sadness and the actual pollen in the air started my hay fever going again.

The butler was a heavy-set man, all thick hair and musty black clothes, and there was about him the faint smell of Saturday matinees in small Midwestern movie theaters now renovated and made into supermarkets and coin laundries.

"Blow off, Jack," he said.

"The name is Pewter," I said. "Tell your boss I'm here to see him."

"Scram, Jacko. We got illness in the family. All the Colonel's unmarried daughters are down with nymphomania."

I didn't speak. I just showed him the barrel of my .38.

"What's that hanging on the end of it?" he asked.

I looked. "Some elastic from my shorts, it seems. Want to make a quip about it?"

"I'll quip you," said the butler, snarling. "You remind me of all the lonely self-abusing one-suited bill collectors that haunted the time-troubled corridors of my long-ago youth."

"I'll do the metaphors around here," I said and went for him. I got two nice chops at his jaw and he tumbled back like a condemned building that has just been hit by a runaway truck.

"Let's not waste any more time," called an old lifeworn voice from inside.

I vaulted the fallen butler and found myself not in a hallway but at once in a giant white-walled room. As I looked on, steam began to come from jets low in the wall.

"The name is Pewter," I said to

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the crumbled old man who sat in a sunchair, wrapped in a towel as white as the flash of a .38 like mine. "You've got a problem?"

"Vachel Geesewand said you'd cleared up that business in Santa Monica," said Bultitude.

"I cleared up the whole damn town before I quit."

"Good. My problem," said the old man, "is simply this. About twenty-two years ago in Connecticut—the name of the town doesn't matter—a young man named Earl K. M. Hoseblender was riding a bicycle down East 34th Street, heading for a hardware store."

"Go on," I said, interested now.

"My wind wanders," he admitted. "That isn't the right problem. That one the police will handle. What I want you to do is find my daughter, Alicia."

"I can do that."

"Alicia is a strange girl," said the old man. "For a long time she wore a false beard and hung out with the surfers at Zuma Beach. They drove around in an old ice-cream wagon they'd painted with peppermint stripes."

"Red and white stripes?"

"You've guessed it," said Tro Bultitude. "Then about a year ago there was an accident."

"What kind of an accident?"

"Alicia never told me. I do know that the bell fell off the ice cream wagon, she's talked about that often. And a boy named Kip may have broken his left ankle. It was all a year ago, a long time ago for a twenty-year-old like Alicia.

"You see, Mr. Pewter, Alicia has not had an untroubled childhood. When she was four my first wife—the former Hazel Wadlow Whitney—fell unaccountably from the top of a Christmas tree and succumbed. Alicia was the only witness." He sighed a dry dead sigh, like leaves being swept up by a slipshod gardener. "At fourteen she was unavoidably involved in a bank robbery in Connecticut. The town will be nameless."

"Is it the same town Hoseblender was riding his bicycle in?"

"No," he admitted. "It's a different nameless town."

"Do you have any pictures of your daughter?"

"Yes, but you'll have to be careful who you show them to since they're pornographic. Another unfortunate moment in the poor child's past."

"When'd she leave?"

"The day after my fourth wife—the former Hazel Wadlow Whitney—fell off the cupola."

"I thought Hazel Wadlow Whitney was your first wife?"

"This is a different Hazel Wadlow Whitney. I have a tendency to marry women with that name. It has upset Alicia more than once. When she was fifteen she ran away to Topeka, Kansas, and was later arrested for trying to break the Menninger Brothers' windows."

"Any idea where she might be?"

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"You might look for that candy-striped ice-cream wagon."

I scowled at his finished old lusterless eyes. "You're keeping something back from me."

"Very well," he said, making a feminine gesture. "She is not alone. There is a strong possibility she may be with her half brother. You see, fifteen years ago I discovered a foundling on my doorstep. He was nearly five at the time and quite bright. The note pinned to him explained that he had an IQ of 185."

"How does that make him a half brother to Alicia?"

"I can't tell you that."

"A hundred dollars a day and expenses is my fee," I told him.

"Dawes will give you an envelope full of money, Mr. Pewter. If you'll excuse me I have to take a steam bath. I suffer from a malignant disease and steam seems to be good for me."

The room, now that I noticed it, was as foggy as the 2900 block on Jackson Street in San Francisco. I said goodbye and went out to find the butler and my money.

Chapter Three

Something old Bultitude had said gave me a hunch and I took a jet to Connecticut as soon as I left him.

The night seems timeless when you are hurtling through it at a fast clip—like a marble in some pinball machine in a grease-and-chili-smelling place on some hot, dry side street on the underbelly of Southern California. We all of us drag the past with us like one of those big silver trailers that clog the L.A. highways. Looking, all of us, for a place to pull off the road and park the damn thing but we never do it.

Spent time is somewhat like the bird in that poem by Coleridge and we carry it around our neck like a gift necktie that we have to wear to please the giver, who gave it to us like somebody passing out the second-rate wine now that the guests, who sit around like numbed patients in some sort of cosmic dentist's waiting room, are too unsober to know or care.

I suppose you've felt like that when you're flying, too.

Chapter Four

The cops beat me up in Connecticut. They always do. But I found out what I wanted. By noon, on a hot, dry, sticky-90-and-climbing day, I was back at the drivein I'd gone to by mistake.

The kitchen was like all the meals they made you eat as a lonely child. It smelled of oatmal and fried foods and stale chocolate cake.

"You," I said to the frycook.

He was a pale youth of about twenty. His face had the worn look of one who has lost two falls out of three—lost too many battles with the dark side of himself.

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"Don't bug me now, mister," he said. "I've got to fry three orders of oatmeal."

I picked a soft spot in his belly and gave him a stiff-fingered jab there. He fell over onto the stale chocolate cake, making the silent falling sound that a giant tree does when it topples alone in a distant wood.

"I know you're Albert B. Bultitude," I told the kid, jerking him to his feet. "Yesterday when I came in here I saw the overcoat."

"You weren't in this kitchen yesterday, mister."

"Don't mix me up while I'm trying to explain this case," I said. "They told me some things in Connecticut."

"Sure, they're a knowledgeable bunch in Connecticut. You take Westport, for instance, they have a great many gifted people there."

"Forget that," I told him. "I know who your mother is."

His eyes flickered like a cigarette lighter about to run out of fluid. "How did you guess?"

"She let the towel slip when she was in the steam bath and I figured it out."

"Well, you're right. Our mistake was keeping the past festering too long."

"It wasn't Hazel Wadlow Whitney who fell from the cupola, it was Tro Bultitude, pushed by you. I thought Dawes was too tough. He's really your Uncle Brewster from Maine. Still the whole business about the silverware doesn't make sense to me."

"I never heard of any silverware."

"Good. Then I'll leave that part out."

"I guess you know about Alicia, too."

"There is no Alicia," I said. "There never was. Alicia is really Tony, your other half brother. He drove the car that time in Connecticut. The accident with the ice-cream wagon made him walk funny and then he decided to try the Alicia bit."

"It's odd how the past catches up with us," said Albert.

"The only thing is," I said, watching the oatmeal burn away to ashes, "I still don't see why your mother hired me at all. She's accomplished only the arrest of her son for the murder of her husband."

"Mother's been rather dotty since she fell off the Christmas tree that time."

I needed a lungful of fresh air. "Let's go, Albert. I know some cops in L.A. who aren't corrupt and I'm turning you over to them."

Outside Albert stared at the bright, intense blue of the ocean. He hesitated for a long second and then waved boyishly at the mindless timeless water.

"Goodbye," he called. "I don't think I'll be seeing the ocean again for a while."

He was right.

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"If Mr. Copcott had been seen, he would not have been noticed; if he had been noticed, he would not have been suspected; if suspected, not described; if described, not found . . ."

An Avramesque thriller, a Davidson chiller. . . .

THE RESTORER OF BALANCE

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

THE CAT THAT CROSSED THE PATH of Mr. Gregory Copcott that afternoon, deep in the evils of winter, was not black, and in any event Mr. Copcott was not superstitious. The thought of kicking the cat nevertheless entered his mind. How gratifying it would be—the images rose, warm and comfortable in the cold and gray and slush—the good solid feel of toe against ribs, the satisfying sound of the bones as they cracked, the . . .

But not so much as a smile touched Mr. Copcott's face as he walked on without even looking again at the creature—for Mr. Copcott was nothing if not disciplined.

Meanwhile Dr. Mainwaring was looking at *his* cats, and as he did so he sighed and shook his head. Mrs. Wilson murmured sympathetically, almost as much for him as for the animals.

"Poor beasties," fretted Dr. Mainwaring. "See how they droop. See how their coats lack luster, how they are shedding. Oh, too bad, too bad."

Drab but efficient Mrs. Wilson screwed up her thin and colorless lips and made a sorrying sound. "It's being cooped up like this all winter," she said.

"It *is not* being cooped up like this all winter at *all*," the doctor said sharply, "as you very well know, Mrs. Wilson. Are you sure that no one has given them something to eat that they shouldn't have had?"

Mrs. Wilson first drooped, then drew herself up defensively. "I'm sure that I do my best, sir—" she began.

"Yes, yes. I know. Forgive me. You are very good, Mrs. Wilson. It's just that it hurts me to see them so sad and wan. Well. We know what we have to do. Give them nothing to eat this afternoon, and, of course, nothing to eat tomorrow afternoon. Then we shall see—exercise, vitamins, and all the rest—a return of the natural *élan vital*."

"Yes," Mrs. Wilson agreed. "Yes, indeed, sir."

Mr. Copcott moved only as briskly as the weather required him to, no more; neither did he loiter. His

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clothes had all been purchased at the Salvation Army, the Volunteers of America, or one of the many Good Will establishments. He was a strong advocate of these organizations, though of course he never actually gave them anything, considering that their activities on behalf of the derelict, the downtrodden, and the homeless constituted an unwarranted interference in the balance of nature.

Mr. Copcott was very strong on ecology, holding firm opinions which he never disclosed to anyone. The clothes, however, weren't to be passed up; serviceable, neither too new nor too old, and, above all inconspicuous.

Other people may spend their lives trying to build themselves up. Mr. Gregory Copcott, on the other hand, spent the greater part of his existence building himself down—with the result that he had by now reached an obscurity bordering on invisibility—and all this without developing a reputation as either a recluse or an eccentric.

Or, indeed, for that matter, any kind of reputation at all.

In a large city this can be done by a truly dedicated individual, mastering the difficult task of self-denial to the point where it is not even noticed as such. Mr. Copcott, passing now through the city streets in the thickening of later afternoon, was for the moment at complete detachment from all ordinary cares. He had performed his periodic change of indifferent lodging, and his periodic resignation from an indifferent job, and had not yet applied for the next one.

He passed through square streets and beat streets with the utmost tranquility, his lackluster eyes taking in everything without seeming to take in anything. He was seeking, seeking, and when he found what he sought—object and occasion—he would act. But it was perhaps too early as yet. Dirty-nosed children dodged around him without noticing him, cars slowed up for him as he crossed the street, without the drivers even being aware of what they had done. The few trees were gaunt and naked; the few dogs, shivering, did not snarl at him, or nuzzle, or follow him.

Mr. Copcott had so successfully perfected his nonpersonality that he never raised any alarm wherever he went. If he had been seen, he would not have been noticed; if he had been noticed, he would not have been suspected; if suspected, not described; if described, not found. He stopped now at a wooden hutch which had once been painted green, and, for a coin dropped on the counter to be scooped in by a vendor who did not even look up, he purchased an early edition of an evening newspaper.

Then Mr. Copcott moved off down the chill street, now and then slowing somewhat to gaze into the warm and glowing windows of the

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shops, while he carefully folded his paper.

It was growing late—it had grown almost late enough to be quite safe. Too late would not do—when too few people were about, those about were more apt to be observed. And Mr. Copcott was not merely skillful, he was cautious.

Luck, that auspicious and chancy jade, was with him. It was not merely that he spotted a likely candidate—one may spot them anywhere; it was more than that.

Let no one assume that the shy fawn, protectively colored by nature so as to blend into its background, is not aware of other shy fawns hiding likewise nearby; or that the tawny lion, obscure against the vastness of the veldt, does not note the approximate presence of an equally tawny lioness. Or that Mr. Gregory Copcott, having put himself for so long to an infinite number of pains in order to become obscure, would single out as his object anyone who, if not equally obscure, was not at least on the same plane of obscurity. His logic was impeccable on both counts.

Regard the object, now, as through the eyes of Mr. Gregory Copcott. Not young enough to arouse the glance of lust, nor old enough to kindle the gaze of pity; clothes of just the proper degree of drabness as to constitute camouflage; colorless eyes; hair which must be assumed to exist because no attention was attracted to its absence; and the face a mere space between collar and hat.

There she was.

Long widowed, probably, and long resigned to it; possessing, doubtless, neither friends nor enemies; a long, late, lusterless afternoon of a life, with milestones few and features feeble; utterly useless, encumbering the crowded planet and clogging its sorely vexed ecology.

A slow purr of excitement and content began to rise soundlessly in Mr. Copcott's chest. He passed on a short distance, then turned and followed. Nearby was the Park, the great and delectable Park, the ideal coursing ground, full of lovely groves and paths and hollows. And now, miraculously, it was just late enough and here she was, an obvious, an incurable and confirmed Park wanderer. The signs were all over her—to those like Mr. Copcott who could read the signs.

She even spoke—not necessarily to him, not necessarily to the woman who was plodding abreast of her and then passed her. She spoke, announcing her reedy note of tiny triumph, to the too-indifferent world.

"They're giving out samples. Just across the Park, in the store there. I've been three times today. Free samples . . ." Her voice died away. She walked onward.

Mr. Copcott crossed the street, now a faithful shadow to the end. And the Park was filled with large

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purple shadows and there were few people about—few but just enough.

Did she notice him?—Mr. Copcott the unnoticeable. It seemed that she did. Sometimes this happened. If they showed the slightest alarm, Mr. Copcott quickly vanished. But they did not always show alarm. A certain awareness sometimes existed—the flicker of what had been life and its pleasures. But indifferent to this, as to so much else, Mr. Copcott had no reason not to take advantage of it. He followed; followed; followed.

The object was now found, the occasion drawing near, the place irrevocable, the means always the same. A gun was insane, a knife left nasty traces, even a muffler or handkerchief could be clawed at, leaving telltale fragments hiding under frantic fingernails. But an evening newspaper, infinitely anonymous, folded first in a certain way, then folded smaller in another certain way (and, oh, the practice, the long years of practice!), then folded for the last time and tucked in on itself just so—

Such an object was not only not illegal, it was unnoticable—not to the eye not to the mind. And—held in the hand just right, fingers clenched on it just right, so that the requisite few inches protruded from the clenched fist—it was incredible how solid a mass could be formed from so fragile a thing as newsprint! Then he had but to calculate the strides, the height, the distance—swing suddenly, with force—

The temple is easily found and it is surprisingly fragile. The victims fall without a murmur. And they do not rise again until the Resurrection of the Dead. The restorer of the balance of nature passes on at his customary and unnoticed pace, and as he walks he casually unfolds his evening newspaper. And there is one less ugly, aging, useless, unloved and all but unknown woman to encumber the earth.

This one, now, she knew he was there—ah, she did know!—with now and then a seemingly unconcerned backward glance. Into the darkened Park he followed her, catlike. Here and there the gates were closing, but she led him by a familiar way, a short cut; so unhesitatingly she walked, thinking thus to be soon back home . . . and Mr. Copcott followed.

She vanished into the deepened shadows, reappeared, vanished, did not reappear. Confidently he walked on. He knew now where he was. No one else was there, but that was as it should be. He walked on, seeing a patch of faint, reflected light ahead of them. And then—

Oh, God! Oh, horror and dread! There—there! In the faint light ahead of him, great, long, and terrible it was and it could not be and yet it was, and Mr. Copcott's legs forsook him and his heart burst

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within him and he turned and opened his mouth and gave a faint cry as loud to him as all the vanished world itself . . .

The next day Dr. Mainwaring was as happy as was usual to a man who loved his work and had reached a peak in his chosen career.

"Yes, yes," he said, beaming and rubbing his hands. "That did the trick, Mrs. Wilson—it always does. It's just as I said—excercise, vitamins, and a return of the *élan vital*. See how happy they look, how sleek!"

Mrs. Wilson nodded. Dr. Mainwaring said, "You managed it quite well—of course, you always do. The—uh—usual?"

She nodded.

"Well, well. It's nature's way, nature's wonderful balance," he burbled. "These dull, drab, and, let us face it, these useless old chaps, what have they to live for? Does anyone ever miss them? Has there ever been a word in the newspaper? Or a single question asked? Never. And meanwhile—oh, Mrs. Wilson, just look at them! My beautiful, beautiful cats!"

Mrs. Wilson reflected, though somewhat dimly, his pleasure. "Dr. Mainwaring," she said, rather slowly. "I must admit that I am—and have been—a little troubled by these admittedly necessary measures."

He turned to her, utterly amazed. "'Troubled'?" he cried. "But why?"

"Because," she said. "Because—well, because, Dr. Mainwaring, this is not the natural food of young and healthy tigers. Certainly, of course, it is infinitely better for them than the dead, cold slaughterhouse stuff on which we must ordinarily feed them. But, as your assistant curator, I feel it my duty to suggest—would not an antelope be more natural, healthier, for the dear creatures?"

Great was the astonishment of Dr. Mainwaring. "My dear Mrs. Wilson," he said in his gravest tone. "Really, I marvel at you. How could we ever justify the loss of an antelope? The Department of Ungulates would *never* consent to it. And think," he said, preparing to dismiss the matter, "think of the Budget Committee and the Board of Trustees!"

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We confess to being uncertain as to just what we should say editorially about Holly Roth's "Who Walks Behind?"—how much we should say, how little we should say. Somehow it seems inadequate to tell you that we think "Who Walks Behind?" is a beautifully written story, an important story, a truly distinguished story. And to tell you about the characters and the plot seems equally inadequate—and perhaps, in this instance, presumptuous. So we'll simply let the author speak for herself by quoting briefly from the letter which accompanied her manuscript. Holly Roth wrote: "It is a suspense story—in the sense that all stories are tales of suspense . . . I like the story because it says something about this world"—and in our opinion, that it does, dear reader, that it does . . .

WHO WALKS BEHIND?

by HOLLY ROTH

THE TELEPHONE BELL RESTORED him to desk and office, and brought back his gaze which, outwardly focused on the dreamy little toy-bridged lake of Geneva, had with the inward eye transplanted on it a forbidden city. The transplantation was a triumph of castle building, for over Geneva's low neatness and bourgeois prettiness he had raised the monumental architecture of the Mala Strna and the Hradcany, the Stare Mesto and the Nove Mesto.

On Geneva's modern French buildings he had imposed an architecture that was itself a superimposition—Gothic on the Romanesque, Renaissance on the Gothic, and Baroque over all. The seven little bridges had given way to massively buttressed masonry like the Charles Bridge, with its imperious, commanding statues. The Rhone became the Vltava, and a hundred spires rose . . .

And the phone rang. George Pavlik said, "Hello?" into the receiver and was answered by Henri, the old man at the main Information Desk, who said in a rush, "Georges? I've got a man down here—" and then he paused.

George waited patiently. Henri always spoke in spates and waits. And whenever Henri was confused, which was often, he called on old friend "Georges," now risen to grand heights. Heights or no, George was patient with him.

It was almost ten years since George had started working in the

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building as the front doorman. Henri had been at the Information Desk then, and he would be there until the day his pension released him. Others started low and earned or badgered their way up the stairs; but Henri, simple-minded and trustworthy, could be depended on to remain stationary on the ground floor. He had one almost-distinction: Henri was Genevois. In that international organization, perched extraterritorially on the town of Geneva, Geneva's citizens were in the tiny minority.

Henri said, "He doesn't speak French or Italian, and my German isn't very good. And his English isn't very good."

"What does he want? Do you understand that?"

"Yes. A job."

"Well, then, why don't you call the head of personnel and—"

"No, no. He thinks this is a job-getting place. A sort of employment agency."

"Disabuse him. Tell him it's not."

"He's a refugee."

George, who had risen from the position of refugee to the split-hair improvement of being a stateless person, was not involved, officially or otherwise, in the processing of refugees. He said patiently, "Well, then, send him over to the office of the High Commissioner for Refugees in the UN building."

"He's been there."

Oh my lord, George thought.

"He's a Czech." As usual, even when Henri did have a point, he arrived at it belatedly.

A Czech. Nothing happens inside me any more, George thought. He said, "All right, Henri. Put him on." After a second, when no voice came over, George spoke to the rustle of presence on the other end: "Hello. My name is Pavlik. Can I help?"

"My name is Janos Kalina. I don't know. I thought I could get work here." His Czech was fumbling and atrocious, larded with German and Slovak. "But it's all right. Never mind. I can manage." The slow, heavy voice sounded frightened.

George felt irritation. Who said anything was wrong? *What* was all right? "Look," he said, "where did you come from?"

"Why, Czechoslovakia."

"Yes"—dryly. With that accent? "But since then?"

"Well, I came out into Austria and they let me come here."

Came out . . . George said sharply, "*When* did you come out?"

"Six days ago."

"I see." But he didn't see. "All right, come up—" George developed a Henri-like pause. Have the man alone in his office? He said, "No, I'll come down."

The entrance hall was a cold affair of mottled gray marble and distant ceilings. The man stood alone in its center. He looked lonesome and he looked ridiculous, in

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the way that a clown manages the combination.

He was short and enormously wide, and his suit made him seem more so. The suit was dark gray, very heavy. Its shoulders were broader than the broad man, and its trousers achieved a farcical pantaloon quality. George, educated to the narrow European trouser leg, thought briefly of his wife's American friends and of the Americans he worked with—but these pants were twice as flappingly open as theirs. Khrushchev, he thought. Khrushchev wore trousers like that.

The man's face also was horizontally designed. His nose spread across it for an astonishing distance, and his mouth was wide enough to remind George of the caricatured personalization of the moon. But it was looser than the moon's curling smile. His face, too, looks a little like Khrushchev's, George thought, but with beautiful dark eyes. He looks like a cross between Khrushchev and Li'l Abner (George's wife was American)—the strength and innocence of Li'l Abner veneered over the darkness of a Khrushchev.

George said, *"Nazdar,"* and then, suddenly, all his long lean elegance revolted against the implications of brotherhood. He and this man were about the same age—35, and they were both Slavs, that was the end of parallelism. He said badly, "You're not Czech."

"No, Slovak."

George switched to Slovak, which he spoke grammatically but without ease. "Why did you tell the receptionist you were Czech?"

"I just said I was from Czechoslovakia."

That was logical. But his Slovak wasn't very good either. "How did you get out?"

"I crossed the border. South of Bratislava. Into Austria."

"Just like that?"

"How do you mean? Was it easy? No, it wasn't easy."

"No," George said dryly. "They sent you to Vienna?"

"Yes, and I asked to come here. So they put me on a train, and I came."

Just like that, George thought again. But it wasn't impossible. "Have you registered with the Bureau des Habitants? In the Hotel de Ville?"

"The police? Yes, the refugee people sent me there. And then the police—".

"They aren't really police."

"No? I thought they were political police."

And they were, in a way. "Well?"

"—and the police get me lodging."

"Where?"

"In the Hotel du Monde."

A cheap but clean-looking place near the Gare Cornavin.

"The man telephoned and made a" —he struggled for the word— "a reservation for a week. He told them he would pay for it. It costs

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nine francs a day. Very nice. He—reserved it—for a week."

The Swiss rarely give away money. And the officials of the Bureau des Habitants were probably more hardened than most. But it wasn't impossible. "And the office of the High Commissioner of Refugees did nothing to help? Just sent you to the—the police. No job? No food? No money?"

"Well, they sent me to see a woman—I have her name here." He produced a slip of paper. "She would give me money, they said. But she isn't there."

"Do you have any money?"

"No. I just wanted a job."

"How did you eat?"

"Well, I ate yesterday. A man at the American consulate gave me money."

That evening George said to his wife, "I met a man today who hadn't eaten in twenty-four hours. I gave him twenty francs."

She was preparing dinner, while he sipped a highball, inclining himself backward on a kitchen chair, his long legs causing a traffic problem.

She said, "I always said you would never turn into a Swiss. But on the other hand, I never heard of a panhandler in Geneva. Nor of anyone who was actively hungry."

"He was a Czech."

"Oh?" She gave him a brief appraising glance and then looked back into the salad bowl.

"He said he was a Czech—or didn't exactly—but then he said he was Slovakian."

"That sounds a little confused. Wasn't he Slovakian?"

"Perhaps. I don't know." He stared at the refrigerator door. "He was frightened. He seemed frightened, and when he left, Henri told me that when he—Henri—called me on the phone the guy wanted to run. Seemed to think I might be a member of a Communist delegation. Henri held on to his sleeve, he said." He added reflectively, "He'd make two of Henri, crossways."

"Who's Henri? You mean the old receptionist? This was in the office?"

"Yes." He took a sip. "He had been in a camp."

"This Slovak? A concentration camp?"

"Concentration camp?" He plunked his feet flat on the floor and stared up at her. "What do you mean by 'concentration' camp? You have the American habit of labels, and like so many American labels, they don't really mean anything. What's a 'concentration' camp? It was a camp—political, labor, something."

"Didn't you ask?"

"No!"

So that was an explosive topic. She sought for something innocuous: "What was this man's name?"

"Janos Kalina."

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"Yan-ish. That makes a pretty sound."

"It's Hungarian. Slovak isn't particularly pretty."

'But—Hungarian?"

"Slovaks often have Hungarian names." Oddly, he looked comforted.

"Tell me the rest of the story."

"What's there to tell? I'm buying him a lunch tomorrow. But before then"—his anger found a focus—"I'm going to tell that refugee office a few things about sending people out hungry, homeless, jobless. What are they there for?"

In the morning George telephoned an acquaintance in the refugee office in the UN building. The man was properly apologetic; the person to whom they had sent Jannos Kalina was in charge of refugee funds distribution; she would normally have given Janos a small tiding-over sum. But the woman was on vacation, and they hadn't known it.

"He had proper papers, huh?"

"All in order. As far as one ever knows, of course."

"Of course," George said. "Thanks." He hung up.

So the guy had papers. Officially, he existed as a refugee. George wondered if he had called to confirm that or to reprimand the refugee committee. Anyway, as the official had pointed out, papers had little value.

Janos called punctually at 11:00, as George had told him to. He seemed, George thought with irritation, to manage things like telephones very well. He realized that his irritation sprang from worry; he had been feeling that he should have shown Janos how to dial—not merely have written out his own name, office telephone number, and home address for good measure; he had been thinking that it wasn't good measure at all—that the fellow could hardly take a taxi, so how could he find the house? If he couldn't manage the dial, how would he ask? He spoke no French. But then he did speak German, and a little English. Geneva was multilingual.

What the hell? George said to himself. To Janos he said, "Do you have a trade?" He thought of the wide hands, the simple moonlike face, and realized that to most people he would have offered the politeness of the word "profession." And he thought of his American wife and her annoyance over his reaction to Slovaks. "They are not a servant race," she had once said sharply. "You should know better than to take such a feudal attitude."

"You don't understand." And to her look, he said, "Well, you don't." He added hastily, "I'm sure that your usual explanation is quite right, that when they get to the United States and are properly educated and assimilated, they are all—uh—extraordinary people. And

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supposing you are right, what you ignore is that nothing of the sort ever happened to them in their own country. For nine centuries they were dominated, ruled, and treated as total inferiors by the Magyars. They were, are, and probably always will be peasants."

"It's the 'always will be' that I object to. And what about the other side of the coin? Where there's a peasant, there's an aristocrat. What about the Slovakian aristocracy?"

"Magyarized. More Hungarian than the king."

"Well, then, what about the Czechs? They freed them."

"The Versailles Treaty and a couple of other treaties freed them, bound them with the Czechs. And then the Czechs wrote a constitution that guaranteed Slovaks, and everyone else, equal rights. And what do you think the Slovaks did?"

"What?" she asked reluctantly.

"Proceeded, to all intents and purposes, to put the Czechs in the place of their former Hungarian masters. The Slovak is basically a peasant, a follower."

George thought of that conversation when he said to Janos, "Do you have a trade?"

"I am a machine mechanic. Journeyman."

"Good. Well, I'd better pick you up for lunch. Then you won't get lost. I'll come by the Monde at twelve-thirty. Be ready because I can't park anywhere at that hour, and certainly not near the station."

"I'll wait outside. In front of the hotel door."

George took him to a brasserie that specialized in hills of boiled pork, bacon, and sausages piled on mountains of cabbage, leeks, and sauerkraut. George knew he himself would choke on the fatty, sticky mess, but it seemed an appropriate choice. However, Janos showed no particular appreciation of the dish. He ate slowly, without apparent relish, and as if he didn't intend to finish. But he did finish it all, incredible as was the quantity and glutinous the quality.

During the meal they spoke little. When he did speak, George reverted to the ease of Czech, since no matter how he butchered it, Janos did understand it. And Janos, when he realized that George understood most languages, stopped trying to speak any particular one. On a base of Czech he imposed Slovak, German, Russian, an occasional English word, and a good deal of Hungarian.

He spoke little, ate slowly, and showed no curiosity about anything. He was, however, obliging. When George said, "Do you find Geneva surprising?" Janos replied promptly, "So many cars!"

"Well, but surely they have cars in Bratislava?"

"I was only there a few weeks, of course. They didn't seem to have

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many cars. But then I was thinking of so many other things."

"Why only a few weeks? Had you just got out of the—the camp?"

"Yes. I went home to Bratislava. I have a mother and a sister there. My sister was afraid of me, of my—being." *Existence,* George supplied, in mental Czech. "And my mother didn't recognize me."

"No? That seems astonishing." George heard the blatant skepticism in his voice.

But Janos had a way of not responding to anything short of flat statements. Not only did nuance reflect off him without blemishing the surface, but the sharper-edged thrust of sarcasm made no noticeable entry. He said, with usual lack of inflection, "I weighed forty-five kilos."

If this hulk had ever sunk to forty-five kilos, certainly his own mother wouldn't recognize him. If. "Were you away—in the camp, that is—long?"

"Twelve years." He ate a last morsel, and reached for his ginger ale. He had refused both wine and beer.

Twelve years. In twelve years George had worked his way across many borders; then from student to doorman and from doorman to responsible official; he had married, established a home, possessions, a life; he had learned, lived, grown. "Where were you?"

"Up near Novaya Zemlya." He reached into his pocket and drew out a small pile of neatly folded papers. He extracted the largest, unfolded it gently, and handed it to George.

On the heavy paper was one of the most official-looking documents that George, despite a lifetime of documents, had ever seen. It was written in Czech and Russian, and George found himself clutching it in an effort to control rage. Don't be childish, he told himself; what do such little things matter? But the fact that Russian was an official language of his country did matter —at least, for the moment. At least for the moment he had trouble pushing air through his pinched nostrils.

The document was on the letterhead of the "Minister of Interior and Justice of the Republic of Czechoslovakia." It was dated six weeks earlier, in Prague. It said,

"We, the Minister of Interior and Justice, declare that Janos Kalina, son of Joza and Katarina Kalina, born 28th December, 1926, was convicted on August 9, 1948 of subversive actions against the People's State of Czechoslovakia, of spying for the West and of distributing Western propaganda. Having been sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment at hard labor, and having paid his debt and purged himself of his sin, he is set free on this date. He will, however, for the rest of his life be ineligible for civil privileges."

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It was illegibly, impressively signed and massively sealed.

George looked up into the beautiful eyes set in the large and empty face and said, "Propaganda? Spying for the 'West'? You?"

Janos said placidly, "I was very friendly with the Americans."

His wife waited until after dinner. Then, having established him in a deep chair, well equipped with coffee and brandy, she said, "Did you lunch with your Slovak?"

"Um."

"And?"

"I called a foundry in the morning and got him an appointment. He went over this afternoon, called me back at four. Got the job. Apparently he is a machine toolist or they wouldn't have hired him."

"Is that what he does? And you didn't believe him?"

"No. I mean no, I didn't disbelieve him. That is, I just said he *is* an expert mechanic. Anyway, he starts on Monday." That was Thursday. "He'll get about two hundred francs a week. Dollar an hour, approximately," he translated.

"That's nice. Good money in Geneva, isn't it?"

"Pretty good. Apparently he knows his trade." He eyed his brandy but didn't touch it. "He was in Vorkuta. The camp you asked about was there. Twelve years."

"Good heavens. Is that Siberia?"

"There you go with your labels! No, it is not Siberia. Vorkuta is in the extreme north of European Russia. Near Novaya Zemlya, a big wilderness of an island, glaciers in the north, tundras in the south. In Vorkuta there are tundras, too—black, mucky soil permanently frozen underneath. Nothing grows but moss, miles and miles of thick, green, soppy moss. Janos says he never saw a bird or a tree."

"Twelve years," she said softly.

"Twelve years. He was just one of many. I never dreamed there were so many. He says, if you can trust him, that there are about forty camps, each with four to five thousand people. He says he was in a number of the camps because they change the prisoners around every year or so. To avoid cliques and prisoner organization, I suppose."

"They *are* prisoners? I mean they're penned in? Not just—settlers. something like that?"

"They're penned in, all right. They sleep, or he did, seventy-eight to a room, a little wooden house. Not much bigger than this room. No sanitation. Almost no heat. At six in the morning they got a liter of soup. Then they work until six at night, *without stopping*. Then they get another liter of soup and two hundred grams of bread. Twice a year, on May Day and National Liberation Day"—he choked—"November the seventh, anniversary of the Communist Revolution, they are given all they want of soup and bread and a big hunk of pork, and other delicacies. In recognition

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of the Workers' Paradise. The joke is"—he looked at her and his face twisted—"that on the morning of the second of May one looks forward to the seventh of November, and on the eighth of November one looks forward to the first of May. Janos worked in the coal mines. Prisoners also work on the airfields, enormous modern affairs that will accommodate jets larger than any yet known to exist."

"Women?"

He nodded. "Segregated. They work on the surface, digging, sorting, cleaning up. Otherwise, the same food, same lack of clothes, of sanitation, of heat—the same life. Janos said he'd rather be below. Because of the weather. Nine months of twenty-hour darkness, four hours of dusk. And then summer—three months of rain and permanent gray light." He brooded. "He told me he weighed a hundred pounds when he got out."

"Is he a big man?"

"Wide. He must weigh almost twice that now."

"But George—what had he *done*?"

He looked up at her. "Been friendly with the Americans."

"What?"

"Yes. He has a document that says he was convicted of 'spying' for the United States, and I think he rather likes the term. But as far as I can discover he actually just ran errands. He was twenty-two, twenty-three." He thought for a minute. Then he said, without inflection, "He has a great number of documents, all in irreproachable order. Even an *obcanska legitimace*."

"What's that?"

"A pass. A permit to move about. Impossible to exist without. Granted because of the ministerial document."

"Oh." She was engaged in mental arithmetic. "But," she said, "he must have been sentenced in about nineteen forty-eight, forty-nine."

"That's right."

"But they—the Russians—were our allies. The Americans'. I mean —"

"I know what you mean. But as soon as the ardor cooled, the Reds apparently felt that the enmity should be retroactive. Another thing—something that interests me more—is the composition of the free community up in that wilderness. The unpenned-in—the administrators, the construction and mining engineers, the ones with families, the teachers for the families, all the comparatively free—guess who they are?"

"Ex-prisoners?"

"No. They're the soldiers of the nineteen forty-four to forty-eight period—those who got out of Russia. The men who took Berlin, came down into Czechoslovakia, penetrated Austria."

"Oh."

He nodded. "Possibly infected. Some reward, huh?"

"Terrible." She pondered. "That's

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why he went to the American Consulate?"

"Went to the . . .?"

"You said someone at the Consulate gave him money before he found you."

"'Found' me?"

She looked at him without understanding and he said, "Never mind. He went there because he had promised an American in his compound that he'd go to the first American Consulate he could reach."

"An *American?*"

"Yes. They also had Germans, French, and English. Very cosmopolitan."

"What did the Consulate say?"

"That they could make no promises. They thanked him, and the man he talked to gave him thirty francs."

"I see. Well, they'd have to say that, wouldn't they? They couldn't say more, could they?"

He smiled gently. "No. No, they couldn't."

"George?"

"Yes?"

"Would you like to bring him home to dinner tomorrow? We're having—"

"No!" The word came so explosively that she pushed herself backward in her chair. "No," he repeated. "Into my house? To know what my wife looks like? How do we know who he is? How do I know who walks behind him?"

"I'm sorry. I just—"

"I know. I'm sorry, too. But—*no.* I'll take him to lunch again tomorrow." He said apologetically, "He's costing us a lot of money."

"Why, George! That's so . . . You don't think much about money and you surely know that I—I—" She waved a hand, giving up the impossibility of explaining that she hadn't been born petty or uncharitable. "He's a compatriot of yours."

"Not really." To her chiding look he said, "Well, I don't think of him that way."

"Anyway, he's a human being."

"A refugee, at best."

"What does that mean?"

"Refugees aren't really human beings."

"That sounds—cynical. It's certainly silly."

"Not so silly. Once you've crossed a border, with finality, you've crossed an irrevocable line—and you've crossed out many things. You've given up most of the rights of human beings." He looked at her with love and hopelessness. "One is different," he said.

"That is silly." She could think of nothing else to say, and she was frightened by what seemed to be fright on his face. She had never seen her husband frightened; she couldn't imagine it. He had been in camps himself, a number of them. Not for long periods, and they hadn't been bad—or so she im-

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agined, but he had never told her much about them.

He *had* told her that for a long time, before she met him, he had been followed, approached, "contacted." His stories were formless little tales of formless little incidents. Without deep analysis, she had rather thought that he imagined most of it. Now, she wondered; and she wondered if the little half-experiences had frightened him.

"That's silly," she said. "I have a passport, but outside of that I can't think of any life-or-death 'rights' I have that you don't have."

He said gently, "Have you ever thought of what would happen if I quit my job?"

"You like your job."

"What's that got to do with it? . . . I've never gone into the matter because I don't want to frighten you. But perhaps you should understand. My job gives me internationalism, a sort of world protection. If I should leave it, or be fired, the Swiss could throw me out of Geneva."

"But why should they?"

"Why shouldn't they? They wouldn't let me work without papers, and there would be no reason to support a non-citizen. The Swiss pay their debts, but what do they owe me? They are not a people inclined to pay what they don't owe. You know what would happen then?"

She shook her head.

"I would probably be deported to Germany. Next stop, Czechoslovakia. From there, inevitably, the Russians."

"No," she said. "Absolutely *no*. You always quote that convention—law—whatever it was. In 1951. It said that political refugees couldn't be deported to the land of their origin." She nodded firmly.

"That's right. Ab-so-lute-ly correct, miss." He smiled at her. "And most countries have laws against the forcible removal of people, too. But kidnapings still occur. I'd be nice and handy."

"Oh," she said. "Twenty years."

"That was the sentence. They might just shoot me, but more likely I'd end up in a place like Vorkuta. Mine was somewhat the same sin—love of the 'West,' love of democracy."

There was a cold silence. Then he said heavily, "I'm sorry I was rude about your asking Janos to dinner. You were being kind, of course. But I don't know who he is." And he repeated: "How do I know who walks behind him?"

Under the heavy gray jacket, Janos was wearing a shirt George had brought him the day before. But his maroon tie was as thick and as spotted as ever. How could it not be, George asked himself; but he dismissed the idea of giving him one of his ties. His ties were largely the presents of his wife, and they

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were in excellent, delicate taste. He couldn't imagine them on Janos.

George watched Janos store a lump of beef stew slowly into the vast cavern and suddenly made a discovery. He said, "What's the matter with your teeth?"

Janos masticated. Then he said, "Loose. They're all loose." He reached up, gently gripped his front teeth, and rocked them. They swung back and forth a shocking, incredible quarter of an inch. "Scorbutus," he said. "Scurvy. Nothing grows up there. Everything flown in. They fly in only meat. Pork. Everybody has scurvy. Most lose their teeth. I was lucky. Only my gums got soft, like pudding, so the teeth are loose. Some day they'll fall out, I suppose." He looked complacent, and took another slow bite.

George had long since finished his lunch. Helplessly, he gazed across at the broad forehead bent over the plate and noted again the permanent black smudges—shallow wounds into which coal dust had settled, which had then healed scarlessly over the dust. The little black streaks soothed him. No one would think to fake such marks. Or to loosen teeth.

Or would they?

He watched Janos sip delicately at his ginger ale and said, "You never drink wine? Or beer?"

"Very little."

"But didn't you grow up on it?"

"Grow up . . ."

"All Slovaks drink wine. Didn't you have it on the table when you were a child?"

"My father died when I was very young."

Was that an answer? Perhaps. George said, "You weren't paid anything in the camp?"

"Ten rubles a month."

George caught his breath. The first lie. He said softly, "You told me you weren't paid anything. Nothing at all. I asked you."

"Did you? Ten rubles."

"But why didn't you say that before?"

"Ten rubles isn't much. A kilo of sugar."

"But—" But what? George shut his mouth and then opened it again. "The Frenchman who got out the year before you. He was from Lyons?"

"Lyons, yes."

"He was going back there?"

"He said so."

"What was his name?"

"Etienne."

"Eitenne what?"

Janos strained slightly, then subsided. "Just Etienne. I don't remember more."

Silence set in. Janos chewed. George had realized that Janos would eat any quantity set before him, but as far as he could discover Janos liked no one thing better than anything else. He couldn't be sure since Janos didn't discuss food. He had not said, Good appetite, or Prosit, or That was good, or even

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Thank you. He didn't seem ungrateful, just unaware.

Feeling foolish, feeling that he was forcing, George asked, "You came out into Austria?"

Janos nodded.

"Where?"

Janos hesitated—an unusual reaction—then said, "I don't know exactly. In the countryside."

It was a downright, unmistakable lie. George said, "How?"

"I don't understand."

"How did you get across that border? It's guarded like an Oriental virgin."

"Yes, it is." Janos nodded. And ate.

George said, "Janos. How did you get through a half kilometer of machine-gun emplacements and barbed wire and land mines without help?"

"But I had help. Someone helped me."

"Who?"

"But that's it. That's what I can't tell you." He looked remotely disturbed. "I mustn't tell you who, and I mustn't tell you why. Or how. It wouldn't be nice." He looked earnestly at George, and said, "It wouldn't be nice, Jaroslav, would it?"

It was the first time Janos had called him by name. He didn't particularly like it. He said, "No, it would be unthinkable." Even if it were the NKVD, it would be unthinkable—if for different reasons. He said, unwillingly, "What are you going to do over the week-end?"

Janos shrugged. "Walk a little?"

George struggled, then gave in. "I'll call you tomorrow."

On Saturday mornings George too was given to the habit of walking. He usually went downtown and window-shopped, which he delighted his wife by referring to, in direct translation from the French, as "window-licking."

That Saturday he spent a couple of leisurely hours, which as usual he devoted largely to thinking. The dummies, the ghostly reflections, the whole strange inanimate world of show windows stimulated his mind. During his ambling, he said hello to a dozen acquaintances. George had no friends, only acquaintances, and yet he was very well liked. A fellow-student had once expressed it well. They were both in Interpreters' School at the time, and the young man used as analogy the burningly painful subject that was currently absorbing his mind. "George is like the German language," he said. "Very easy to know superficially, and then you hit unyielding bedrock."

And one of George's legion of ex-girl friends, when she learned of his marriage, said, "How did she manage just to *know* him that well? He never tells you anything, but if you ask he looks at you as if you had said a dirty word." The explanation was simple: his wife never tried to "know" him in any possessive sense. She loved him, trusted him, and accepted the limitations

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that his character imposed on their life—as one instance, a lack of close friends. Since George did not trust people, they had no friends. But she understood that the wall he lived behind had not been erected for the purpose of excluding her. She also knew it would never come crashing down, but she thought it might get thin in small spots. And it had thinned, considerably, although it showed no signs of falling.

Toward noon George climbed up to the Bourg de Four, and dropped into a students' cafe. He shook hands all around the room, ordered a beer, and asked permission to use the telephone.

The telephone operator at the Hotel du Monde said, "Monsieur Kalina? Will you repeat that, please?"

"Janos Kalina."

"Yan-ish Kalina. Ne quittez pas, s'il vous plait."

He held on, with his usual patience, but it seemed a long time before she came back on the wire. Then she said, in singsong Genevois French, "We have no Monsieur Kalina registered."

"But that's—" She had hung up.

George called back. Connected, he said, "Mademoiselle, you *do* have a Monsieur Kalin. He registered three days ago. If you—"

"I'll give you Reception."

Reception was sorry; there was no such person; the clerk rang off abruptly.

George hung up, paid for his untouched beer, walked out into the Bourg de Four, was lucky to find a cab, climbed in, and said, "Hotel du Monde."

He slammed the door behind him, stalked into the living room, and dropped himself into a chair opposite his wife. The abruptness was very unlike his usual ambling air.

She looked up from her book and said, "George, what is it? Good heavens, are you drunk? It isn't—"

"He isn't there. Janos. He isn't at the Monde. He isn't registered. He's *never* been there."

"What—"

"I telephoned. They said he wasn't registered. So I went over. I took the place apart. I started with the desk, moved into the office, and ended up with the manager *and* his assistant. They never heard of Janos. They showed me their register and I checked it back for a week. No Janos Kalina. They kept trying to sell me a Yugoslav, a man I know who's lived there for a couple of years. They seemed to feel that one Slav was as good as another."

She had never seen him quite like this and couldn't interpret his expression. He was excited, but he didn't seem angry. He had an air of anticipation, almost of amusement. He looked—she sought for a comparison—like a man who was listening to a joke told by someone he knew to be a superb storyteller; he was anticipating the pleasure of the tagline. She didn't understand.

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"Now look," she said, "it's impossible. From what you've said, he's simple. Why should he lie? George, you must have got the name of the hotel wrong. After all, he doesn't speak French. His pronunciation is probably—"

"No." he shook his head positively, moving it harder and faster than usual. "I picked him up there. Twice. Twice I've gone by and he's been standing in front of the Monde."

"Oh, Well, then, maybe he checked out."

"I looked at the register."

"Um. Perhaps he didn't want to spend that much for a room but because the man at the Bureau des Habitants had reserved it he didn't want to admit that he hadn't done as he was told, so he took the money and . . ." But he was shaking his head again.

"First of all, the man at the Bureau didn't give him the money. Janos told me distinctly that the official had telephoned and promised the hotel *he* would pay the bill. He didn't hand any money to Janos. And secondly, the hotel says that not only is Janos Kalina not there, but that they never had a reservation in that name and they never had any such call."

"George," she said, and suddenly she shared his amusement. "George . . ." No man likes to be made a fool of, she thought, but it seemed irresistibly funny. She struggled, smiled, and through the smile came laughter. "Darling, you've been taken! You've been conned!"

The tagline had been reached. He joined her laughter with an outsized roar. He said, "The cautious Pavlik! Pavlik, who is said to trust no one. Taken! And by that simple type! It's for the records. It's unbeatable." He shook with laughter.

She sobered. "But you did check the refugee office. He does exist."

"Sure. And maybe most of his story is true. Suppose it all happened several years ago? He just goes around making a living this way. So I'm out fifty francs or so, and some old shirts and sweaters. In return, I'm a little wiser."

"But—Geneva is too small. He can't get away with such a con game for long."

"Maybe he goes from town to town, from country to country."

"Maybe." She thought it unlikely, but didn't want to push it. "Well, just in case, hadn't you better warn his prospective—clients? Isn't there a sort of club of Czechs here?"

"Yes, but I'm not their favorite compatriot. They once asked me to join and I wrote back promptly assuring them that I'd be delighted—on receipt of a list of their entire membership with dossiers of each. They never answered *that*. Group is probably riddled."

Pavlik, the wary, the untrusting. "Well,"—she smiled again—"I suppose he can't get far. It seems a lot of work on his part for so little gain. Let's forget all about it."

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"Not for a minute; I'll laugh until I die. And Monday I'll call the foundry and the refugee office and the Bureau des Habitants. But I suppose the answers are foregone. I've been taken."

They had been invited to a cocktail party that evening and while she was dressing she remembered the document from the ministry in Prague. The dates seemed undebatable, and George had laid stress on its heavy authenticity. But she didn't pursue the thought; George had been under a strain and now he was free of it. He had lost a considerable portion of his usual reserve. He was almost ebullient. The wall had not only thinned to transparency, it actually seemed possible that it would disappear entirely.

She firmly dismissed the matter of Janos Kalina, the refugee con man.

The cocktail party was pleasant, and they both felt gay when they left. They had intended to dine out, but when they reached the street they found that big white flakes were falling with deceptive leisureliness. It would soon be very pretty; it was already very cold. Winter had come without warning, and they were not dressed for it. Anyway, they were full of cocktail snacks. Home seemed a warm and happy thought, and almost without comment they headed for their apartment.

They undressed, put on heavy robes, and then ate in the kitchen—cold meats and a bottle of almost warm and very warming red wine. They enjoyed the unusual meal and lingered in the kitchen, smoking and sipping. George was almost expansive, and he was indulging himself in an unusual conversational occupation—the making of plans. Normally he lived from minute to minute, as if he thought tomorrow would not come. But that night he ranged forward to the next weekend—they would go mushroom hunting, he suggested—and then to the spring—perhaps they could have a week on the Riviera?

He had got himself well into a full summer-vacation itinerary when the doorbell rang.

For a second neither of them moved. Then she looked down at her watch. 10:15. She looked up at him, but he was staring out the kitchen door, down the hallway, and at the front door. As always, she thought, his reaction to a doorbell was as ridiculously extreme as was her mother's to a telegram: they assumed it could only be bad news.

But it was true that they had no friend of dropping-in status. And it was nighttime.

He got up, and as he left the kitchen he pulled the door to a crack.

No one, she thought, was to see his wife, his kitchen, his life.

She heard the murmur of the soft consonants, the long vowels, thought what a pretty language it

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was, and wished that Janos had stayed away.

The subdued voices came from the hallway for a long time, but finally the door closed and footsteps passed her and went into the living room. She was relieved; George had impeccable surface manners, but where his privacy was concerned he could be very abrupt. If he had been dressed he probably would have taken the man around the corner for a beer.

"Have him know what my wife looks like?" echoed in her mind, and she stayed in the kitchen, making a longer than necessary job of cleaning the few dishes.

Finally he called her, and she walked slowly into the living room.

Janos surprised her by standing up. He moved awkwardly. She could see how George had doubted that he had ever weighed as little as a hundred pounds. He nodded and said, "Good evening." The two words were heavily accented. He seemed afraid to look at her, but his one quick glance surprised her; George had not told her that he had unsuitably beautiful eyes.

George said, "Janos has been here three times this evening. He was concerned that I might misunderstand. When he got back to his hotel they told him I had been there, but they explained that they had positive orders from the official at the Bureau des Habitants not to register him, not to acknowledge his existence to anyone. He hadn't known that. And I hadn't thought of it."

"Protecting him," she murmured.

"Yah." Janos flicked a glance toward her right ear. He looked a little surprised, and surprised that he was surprised. She guessed that emotions were unusual to him. He said. "Police to protect. Not the way I know them. Very nice."

She sat for a few minutes, listening to the Czech syllables flowing out of George, the halting heavier speech of Janos. She felt very unnecessary. Into a pause she said, "Will you have coffee? And perhaps some cheese?"

He looked in her general direction, offered a vague smile, and then said something to George.

George translated: "He says coffee is for after meals, but he hasn't eaten today."

"Oh, my goodness!"

"For me, not bad. I used. No mind."

"But you will let me fix something for you?"

George said, "Yes, please. Whatever is easiest."

"Right away." In the doorway she turned and said, "You would have found out Monday anyway."

He looked up and saw her remotely, from behind his high wall, and then he made an unusual attempt, if not to break through it at least to cross over it. "And nothing's really any different," he said. "It's all the same."

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She nodded reassuringly, knowing the words had fallen short of his intention. She looked at his posture, which contrived to be graceful and nevertheless stiff, and she went into the kitchen.

Instinctively, she sought and found a heavy meal not unlike the ones George had fed him. She heated the cold meats and added a gravy, fried sausages, made a large batch of noodles, buttered them generously, and added to them a quantity of sour cream.

She was sorry Janos had come. But George would have found out Monday. And anyhow, other people would cross borders. Doorbells would ring again. Some would be refugees, as she felt sure the man in the living room legitimately was. But George was not sure; George would never be sure.

George was a war victim—one of the incurably war-wounded. His was a wound of the mind, a puncture to the lobe of confidence, of belief in his fellowmen. And the wound was unlikely to heal—partly because it was logical; the world was currently not a place in which such escapees could relax their guard, tend to their knitting, concentrate only on the living of life.

People like George had constantly to fear reprisal, trickery, an involvement beyond their control.

George was not wrong to be suspicious, and she must learn to live with the understanding that he might some day be right in his ceaseless doubts.

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magazine BOX SCORE for 1964

In editing his third volume of the BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR (published in July 1965 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.) Anthony Boucher selected 16 stories, of which 14 appeared in magazines (and of these 14 best, 6 were chosen from *EQMM*). Mr. Boucher's Honor Roll listed 113 stories from magazines and 8 stories from books. Here is the box score for the 113 best detective-crime-mystery stories published in all American magazines during 1964:

name of magazine	*Honor Roll stories*	*percentage*
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine	50	44.2%
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine	13	11.5%
Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine	11	9.7%
The Saint Mystery Magazine	11	9.7%
Playboy	6	5.3%
Saturday Evening Post	4	3.5%
Cosmopolitan	3	2.7%
New Yorker	3	2.7%
Argosy	2	1.8%
McCall's	2	1.8%
This Week	2	1.8%
Atlantic	1	.9%
Baker Street Journal	1	.9%
Cavalier	1	.9%
Chase	1	.9%
Horror	1	.9%
Ladies' Home Journal	1	.9%

The percentages above indicate that *EQMM* published nearly 4 times as many distinguished new mystery stories as our nearest competitor, and nearly 1½ times as many as our 3 nearest competitors put together—and *EQMM's* 50 Honor Roll stories in 1964 did not include the superior reprints, both short stories and short novels, which *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* offers throughout the year.

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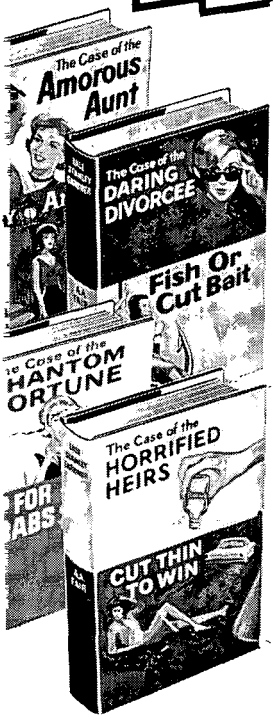
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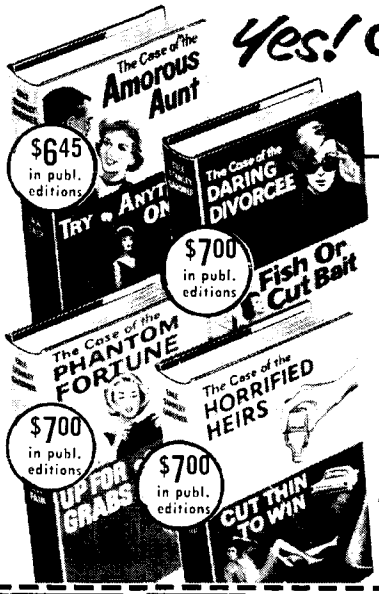
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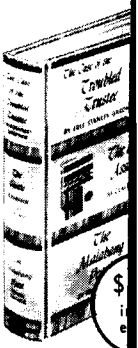

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